2 CORINTHIANS

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Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

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To Chuck Maxwell
and the Pastoral Leadership Team
of Northbrook Church

sincere
sent by God
living before God
in Christ

(2 Cor. 2:17b)

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Series Preface

The chief concern of the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (BECNT) is to provide, within the framework of informed evangelical thought, commentaries that blend scholarly depth with readability, exegetical detail with sensitivity to the whole, and attention to critical problems with theological awareness. We hope thereby to attract the interest of a fairly wide audience, from the scholar who is looking for a thoughtful and independent examination of the text to the motivated lay Christian who craves a solid but accessible exposition.

Nevertheless, a major purpose is to address the needs of pastors and others involved in the preaching and exposition of the Scriptures as the uniquely inspired Word of God. This consideration affects directly the parameters of the series. For example, serious biblical expositors cannot afford to depend on a superficial treatment that avoids the difficult questions, but neither are they interested in encyclopedic commentaries that seek to cover every conceivable issue that may arise. Our aim, therefore, is to focus on those problems that have a direct bearing on the meaning of the text (although selected technical details are treated in the additional notes).

Similarly, a special effort is made to avoid treating exegetical questions for their own sake, that is, in relative isolation from the thrust of the argument as a whole. This effort may involve (at the discretion of the individual contributors) abandoning the verse-by-verse approach in favor of an exposition that focuses on the paragraph as the main unit of thought. In all cases, however, the commentaries will stress the development of the argument and explicitly relate each passage to what precedes and follows it so as to identify its function in context as clearly as possible.

We believe, moreover, that a responsible exegetical commentary must take fully into account the latest scholarly research, regardless of its source. The attempt to do this in the context of a conservative theological tradition presents certain challenges, and in the past the results have not always been commendable. In some cases, evangelicals appear to make use of critical scholarship not for the purpose of genuine interaction but only to dismiss it. In other cases, the interaction glides over into assimilation, theological distinctives are ignored or suppressed, and the end product cannot be differentiated from works that arise from a fundamentally different starting point.

The contributors to this series attempt to avoid these pitfalls. On the one hand, they do not consider traditional opinions to be sacrosanct, and they

are certainly committed to doing justice to the biblical text whether or not it supports such opinions. On the other hand, they will not quickly abandon a long-standing view, if there is persuasive evidence in its favor, for the sake of fashionable theories. What is more important, the contributors share a belief in the trustworthiness and essential unity of Scripture. They also consider that the historic formulations of Christian doctrine, such as the ecumenical creeds and many of the documents originating in the sixteenth-century Reformation, arose from a legitimate reading of Scripture, thus providing a proper framework for its further interpretation. No doubt, the use of such a starting point sometimes results in the imposition of a foreign construct on the text, but we deny that it must necessarily do so or that the writers who claim to approach the text without prejudices are invulnerable to the same danger.

Accordingly, we do not consider theological assumptions—from which, in any case, no commentator is free—to be obstacles to biblical interpretation. On the contrary, an exegete who hopes to understand the apostle Paul in a theological vacuum might just as easily try to interpret Aristotle without regard for the philosophical framework of his whole work or without having recourse to those subsequent philosophical categories that make possible a meaningful contextualization of his thought. It must be emphasized, however, that the contributors to the present series come from a variety of theological traditions and that they do not all have identical views with regard to the proper implementation of these general principles. In the end, all that really matters is whether the series succeeds in representing the original text accurately, clearly, and meaningfully to the contemporary reader.

Shading has been used to assist the reader in locating salient sections of the treatment of each passage: introductory comments and concluding summaries. Textual variants in the Greek text are signaled in the author's translation by means of half-brackets around the relevant word or phrase (e.g., ⌜Gerasenes⌝), thereby alerting the reader to turn to the additional notes at the end of each exegetical unit for a discussion of the textual problem. The documentation uses the author-date method, in which the basic reference consists of author's surname + year + page number(s): Fitzmyer 1992: 58. The only exceptions to this system are well-known reference works (e.g., BDAG, LSJ, *TDNT*). Full publication data and a complete set of indexes can be found at the end of the volume.

Robert Yarbrough
Robert H. Stein

Author's Preface

Most commentators have agreed that 2 Corinthians, this letter of the apostle's broken yet buoyed heart, presents a work on which a commentator can easily break his or her heart and head. With good reason, in the preface to his Word Biblical Commentary, Martin (1986: x) describes it as "both the paradise and the despair of the commentator," and Danker (1988: 550–51), one of Martin's reviewers, laments, "A modern interpreter has about as much chance to comprehend all the nuances in 2 Corinthians as an Amish farmer to comprehend a Doonesbury comic strip." Certainly, 2 Corinthians can seem to be an exegetical quarry with luminous veins of gold surrounded by almost impenetrable rock. Thus those who take up the book must do so, to borrow wording from Paul's hardship list in chapter 6, "in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; even in exegetical beatings, interpretive imprisonments and emotional riots." Indeed, walking with Paul in these pages must be done "in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger for understanding" (cf. 2 Cor. 6:4–5). As noted by Furnish (1984: 3), "No Pauline letter requires more of its readers," but he adds encouragingly that no Pauline letter "offers more of a reward to those who apply themselves carefully to its interpretation." Here we have a good reason for taking up the study of this difficult book. The pain brings a reward.

Yet there are various ways to "apply" oneself to the interpretation of 2 Corinthians and many good tools with which to do so, which presses a question, voiced by a lady at church just last week: "Why another commentary on 2 Corinthians?" especially with so many outstanding commentaries already on the shelf? It is a good question, and in various forms the question has become a cliché among commentators on biblical books, has it not? We seek to justify our efforts. But for me, on many mornings over the past few years, as I have stared alternately at the Greek text, an open commentary, and the computer screen, it has been a very personal question. I have reached the age at which giving a significant portion of my life to any project is not done lightly—"Teach us to number our days" (Ps. 90:12 NIV). Furthermore, work on this book in particular took me away from my normal paths of deeper research on the New Testament. In other words, I had a lot of work to do just to get up to speed on basic discussions surrounding such a wonderfully complex letter—and the contours of this letter in particular don't lend themselves to easygoing! Nevertheless, at the end of the journey I am deeply grateful to Baker Academic not only for inviting me to this project but also for being

exorbitantly patient while waiting for its completion. I am thankful to make it through the process for many reasons, but I will mention three.

First, I needed to study 2 Corinthians in greater depth for my own growth, understanding, and edification. To attempt to teach is to learn. To articulate, one must grapple. Although I will spend the rest of my life trying to grasp all the nuances, those elusive subtleties Danker mentions above, the commentary has been a good beginning for me personally, and I hope that other beginners will join me in the journey of discovery. I also hope to delve more deeply into this book in the years to come. In line with the BECNT series, I have worked from the Greek text of the NT, and I normally have begun with my own exegesis and translation before taking up secondary literature, although my exegesis and translation have been informed and constantly adjusted on the basis of the excellent body of literature we now have on the book. My dialogue partners have consisted of a core of commentators and analysts, primarily from the English-speaking world, as well as pertinent primary sources from the Second Temple period, whom I thought would be at least somewhat accessible and helpful to most educated pastors. I make no claim to have covered all the bases on each passage. Even with the generous concessions of my editors, I constantly fought the battle between depth and word count, and too often word count won. It astounds me that one could write a commentary of this length and still live primarily in what seems "the shallows," merely skimming the surface of what needs to be addressed! Thus my hope is that the commentary will serve its readers as it has served me—that it will offer a helpful beginning track, a starting point, for a lifelong study of this rich and complex book.

Second, in spite of the wealth of scholarly resources we now have at our disposal, 2 Corinthians needs and rewards continued study. While not rivaling its older sister, 1 Corinthians, the past four decades have witnessed an increasingly rich flow of rigorous and reflective commentaries, stimulating monographs, and insightful articles on this "second" (which most think is actually the fourth) letter to ancient Corinth. Commentaries like those by Thrall, Harris, Barnett, and Furnish are erudite and expansive, inviting pastors and other students of the Word to a veritable word feast on this book. Yet as I hope to demonstrate at points in this volume, all that could be said has not been said: a fresh look at certain interpretive issues in 2 Corinthians can contribute to a needed, ongoing conversation. This is a great joy in biblical studies—we are always learning and discovering, and that process takes place in community and, at times, amid a cacophony of voices, some barking a bit against particular assumptions expressed by others. I am thankful to have invested time in this project because, at least in a modest way and at least at a few key junctures, I think I have something to say and want to contribute to the conversation. For instance, my interpretations of 2 Cor. 2:14–16 and 3:7–18—both sticky interpretive wickets in their own ways and massively important to Paul's message—attempt to offer pertinent bits of background information that have failed to make it into contemporary discussions. Thus

I hope in some small way to stir up the interpretive pot, not for the sake of novelty but to vie for a fresh reflection on Paul's thought and intended impact.

Third, and in some ways most important, we in the modern church desperately need 2 Corinthians. Barrett (1982: 1) has noted, "If Romans gives us the most systematic presentation of Paul's theology, it is nevertheless from the Corinthian Epistles that we gain the most complete and many-sided picture of how Paul believed that his theological convictions should be expressed in the life of a church." Consequently, we need to hear 2 Corinthians, know it, and take it very seriously as we reflect on how Christian ministry is to be done in the world. Sitting at the feet of this apostle at this painful, critical juncture in his ministry, we find theological and pastoral rhetoric of great beauty and breathtaking depth pouring from a treasure-laden-though-cracked vessel. Harris (2008: 434) has declared that 2 Corinthians, though not normally bearing the label, should be considered "the pastoral epistle *par excellence*." I agree, for the words of 2 Corinthians embody a pastoral strategy, both elegant and wise, that seeks to draw a wandering congregation close, close to their apostle and his mission, and thus close to the true gospel and the true Christ.

And the words draw us. At times and places in the twenty-first century, we the church are wanderers, false teachers, faithful or faithless sufferers, fellow-workers with Paul, disillusioned ministers or congregations, opponents of the true gospel, polished and competitive and powerful public speakers, or powerless leaders who long for status and popularity and social significance like a dehydrated, dying person longs for water. Especially in the American church, we too easily drift into ruts of power, posturing, position, and presentation as the pragmatic backbone of ministerial effectiveness, and 2 Corinthians offers a sobering, loud, cautionary voice against such an approach to ministry. Further, the cultural climate of power and presentation often finds many faithful pastors emotionally battered and burdened under their own perceived limitations. Others face real persecution, brought to bear in various manifestations, and are exhausted emotionally and physically. Thus my hope and prayer is that what is written here may be used to give strong encouragement to those in ministry who find themselves deeply discouraged by opposition in its various forms.

Many people deserve thanks for their parts in bringing this book to completion. I deeply appreciate Moisés Silva, former editor of the series, for the initial invitation, and Bob Yarbrough has served as an encouraging and competent editor in coaching me through to the end. Baker's Jim Kinney has been wonderfully gracious and patient in the face of too many delays, and Wells Turner, the technical editor at the publishing house, has been ever quick to respond, generous in his direction, and encouraging with feedback.

My administrators at Union University, including President David Dockery (now president of Trinity International University), Provost Carla Sanderson, and Dean Gregory Thornbury (now president of The King's College, New York), have always been great encouragers of my work and have a clear-eyed vision for rigorous academic work done for kingdom purposes; further, they

facilitate the space needed to get that work done. In addition the university committee granting research leaves has granted me leaves at two critical stages of the commentary—the very beginning and the very end—for which I am deeply thankful. I have taken both of those leaves at Tyndale House in Cambridge, England. As I sit now at desk 14, surrounded by one of the top biblical studies libraries in the world and looking out on a beautiful summer day, I am deeply grateful to be here. The staff and community of Tyndale House embody the work of biblical studies done in community, for the church, to God's glory and the advancement of his cause in the world. My own Christian community too, Northbrook Church, has prayed for me, encouraged me, and treated my ministry as an extension of its own.

Finally, I must express special gratitude to my wonderful family. My children, Joshua and Anna, have grown up as I have written this commentary; they have been interested, supportive, and my partners in play. Anticipating meals out or movies or even just walks around the yard has gotten me through some days that demanded raw diligence in the books. And words for my Pat fail me. Partner in all ministries. Best friend. Deepest love, save One. Thank you, dear wife, for your wonderfully substantive part in this project. As these "tents" continue to fray, may we never give up, may our inner persons be renewed day after day, and may we be pleasing to him until what is mortal is swallowed up by life (2 Cor. 4:16–5:5).

George H. Guthrie
Tyndale House
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August 2013

Abbreviations

Bibliographic and General

//	parallel
ℵ	Codex Sinaiticus
A	Codex Alexandrinus
acc.	accusative case
AD	*anno Domini*, in the year of the Lord
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*, edited by H. Temporini and W. Haase, part 2: *Principat*, 7.1 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1979)
ASV	American Standard Version
b.	Babylonian Talmud
B	Codex Vaticanus
BC	before Christ
BDAG	*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)
BDF	*A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by F. Blass and A. Debrunner, translated and revised by R. W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961)
C.E.	Common Era
cent.	century
CEV	Contemporary English Version
cf.	*confer*, compare
chap(s).	chapter(s)
CIJ	*Corpus inscriptionum judaicarum* (Rome, 1936–)
CNTUOT	*Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, edited by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic/Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2007)
Darby	Darby Translation, by John Nelson Darby (1890)
DBI	*Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, edited by L. Ryken, J. Wilhoit, and T. Longman (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998)
DJBP	*Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, edited by J. Neusner and W. S. Green (New York: Macmillan Library Reference, 1996)
DJG	*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, edited by J. B. Green, S. McKnight, and I. H. Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992)
DNTB	*Dictionary of New Testament Backgrounds*, edited by C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000)
DPL	*Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993)
EDNT	*Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by H. Balz and G. Schneider, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–93)

e.g.	*exempli gratia*, for example
esp.	especially
ET(s)	English translation(s) or versification
ESV	English Standard Version
fig(s).	figure(s)
frg(s).	fragment(s)
GELNT	*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, by J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: United Bible Society, 1999)
Geneva	Geneva Bible (1599)
GNT	Good News Translation
Goodspeed	*The Bible: An American Translation*, by J. M. P. Smith and E. J. Goodspeed (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931)
hapax	hapax legomenon, a term occurring only once
HBD	*Holman Bible Dictionary*, edited by T. Butler (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991)
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
h.t.	homoeoteleuton (omitting text due to similar endings nearby)
i.e.	*id est*, that is
KJV	King James Version
Knox	Knox Version, translated from the Latin Vulgate by Ronald Knox
LEH	*Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, compiled by J. Lust, E. Eynikel, and K. Hauspie, rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2003)
lit.	literally
LSJ	*A Greek-English Lexicon*, by H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, 9th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940)
LSJSup	*Greek-English Lexicon Revised Supplement*, edited by P. G. W. Glare and A. A. Thompson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996)
LXX	Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek)
m.	Mishnah
𝔐	majority text
Message	Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group, 1993–2004)
Moffatt	James Moffatt, *The Bible: A New Translation* (1926, 1935)
MS(S)	manuscript(s)
MT	Masoretic Text
NA^{27}	*Novum Testamentum Graece*, edited by Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, and B. M. Metzger, 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993)
NA^{28}	*Novum Testamentum Graece*, edited by Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, and B. M. Metzger, 28th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012)
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible (1960–77)
NASB^{95}	New American Standard Bible (1995)
NBD	*New Bible Dictionary*, edited by J. D. Douglas, D. R. W. Wood, N. Hillyer, and I. H. Marshall (Leicester, UK/Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996)
NDBT	*New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, edited by T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000)

NEB	New English Bible
NET	New English Translation
NETS	*A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, edited by A. Pietersma and B. G. Wright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007; 2nd, corrected printing, 2009, http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/)
NewDocs	*New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published in 1976*, edited by G. H. R. Horsley (North Ryde, NSW: Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, 1981–)
NIDNTT	*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, edited by C. Brown and D. Townsley (Exeter, Devon, UK: Paternoster, 1986)
NIV^{84}	New International Version (1973, 1978, 1984)
NIV	New International Version (2011)
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation (1996)
NLT^{2}	New Living Translation, 2nd ed. (2004, 2007)
NPNF^{1}	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, edited by P. Schaff, first series, 14 vols. (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952–57)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
n.s.	new series
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
OTP	*The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by J. H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983–85)
𝔓	papyrus, as for $\mathfrak{P}^{46}$
PG	Patrologia graeca, edited by J.-P. Migne, 161 vols. (Paris, 1857–66)
Phillips	*The New Testament in Modern English* (J. B. Phillips, 1958, 1973)
pl.	plural
pp.	pages
P.Cair.Zen.	*Zenon Papyri: Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire*, edited by C. C. Edgar (Cairo: Inst. Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1925–)
P.Mich.	*Michigan Papyri*, vol. 1: *Zenon Papyri*, edited by C. C. Edgar (Ann Arbor, 1931)
P.Oxf.	*Some Oxford Papyri*, edited by E. P. Wegener (Leiden: Brill, 1942–48)
P.Oxy.	*The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (London: Egypt Exploration Society in Graeco-Roman Memoirs, 1898–)
P.Ryl.	*Catalogue of the Greek and Latin Papyri in the John Rylands Library, Manchester* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1911–52)
P.Sorb.	*Papyrus de la Sorbonne*, vol. 1, edited by H. Cadell (Paris 1966)
P.Stras.	*Griechische Papyrus der Kaiserlichen Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek zu Strassburg*, edited by F. Preisigke (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1906–).
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
t.	Tosefta
TCNT	Twentieth Century New Testament (1904)
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, translated and edited by G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)
Tg.	Targum

Theod.	Theodotion (version of the Greek Old Testament)
TNIV	Today's New International Version
Tyndale	Tyndale Bible, translated by William Tyndale (16th cent.)
UBS[4]	*The Greek New Testament*, edited by B. Aland et al., 4th rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994)
v(v).	verse(s)
v.l.	*vario lectio* (variant reading)
Voice	*The Voice Bible* (Nashville: Nelson, 2012)
Webster	Noah Webster's limited revision of KJV (1833)
Williams	C. B. Williams, *The New Testament: A Translation in the Language of the People* (Boston: Bruce Humphries, 1937; rev. ed., Chicago: Moody, 1950)
x	times (e.g., 2x = two times)
YLT	Young's Literal Translation

Hebrew Bible

Gen.	Genesis	2 Chron.	2 Chronicles	Dan.	Daniel
Exod.	Exodus	Ezra	Ezra	Hosea	Hosea
Lev.	Leviticus	Neh.	Nehemiah	Joel	Joel
Num.	Numbers	Esther	Esther	Amos	Amos
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Job	Job	Obad.	Obadiah
Josh.	Joshua	Ps(s).	Psalm(s)	Jon.	Jonah
Judg.	Judges	Prov.	Proverbs	Mic.	Micah
Ruth	Ruth	Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Nah.	Nahum
1 Sam.	1 Samuel	Song	Song of Songs	Hab.	Habakkuk
2 Sam.	2 Samuel	Isa.	Isaiah	Zeph.	Zephaniah
1 Kings	1 Kings	Jer.	Jeremiah	Hag.	Haggai
2 Kings	2 Kings	Lam.	Lamentations	Zech.	Zechariah
1 Chron.	1 Chronicles	Ezek.	Ezekiel	Mal.	Malachi

Greek Testament

Matt.	Matthew	Eph.	Ephesians	Heb.	Hebrews
Mark	Mark	Phil.	Philippians	James	James
Luke	Luke	Col.	Colossians	1 Pet.	1 Peter
John	John	1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians	2 Pet.	2 Peter
Acts	Acts	2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians	1 John	1 John
Rom.	Romans	1 Tim.	1 Timothy	2 John	2 John
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians	2 Tim.	2 Timothy	3 John	3 John
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians	Titus	Titus	Jude	Jude
Gal.	Galatians	Philem.	Philemon	Rev.	Revelation

Josephus

Ant.	*Jewish Antiquities*	*J.W.*	*Jewish War*

Philo

Abr.	*Abraham*
Agr.	*Agriculture*
Alleg.	*Allegorical Interpretation*
Cher.	*The Cherubim*
Conf.	*Confusion of Tongues*
Contempl.	*The Contemplative Life*
Creat.	*Creation of the World*
Decal.	*The Decalogue*
Drunk.	*Drunkenness*
Emb.	*Embassy to Gaius*
Etern.	*The Eternity of the World*
Flight	*Flight and Finding*
Good Free	*That Every Good Person Is Free*
Jos.	*The Life of Joseph*
Migr.	*The Migration of Abraham*
Mos.	*The Life of Moses*
Plant.	*Planting*
Post.	*The Posterity of Cain*
Prelim. Studies	*The Preliminary Studies*
Prov.	*Providence*
QG	*Questions and Answers on Genesis*
Rewards	*Rewards and Punishments*
Sacr.	*Sacrifices of Cain and Abel*
Spec. Laws	*The Special Laws*
Unchang.	*God Is Unchangeable*
Virt.	*On the Virtues*
Worse	*That the Worse Attacks the Better*

Rabbinic Tractates

The abbreviations below are used for the names of the tractates in the Mishnah (indicated by a prefixed *m.*), Tosefta (*t.*), Babylonian Talmud (*b.*), and Palestinian/Jerusalem Talmud (*y.*).

Ber.	*Berakot*
Mak.	*Makkot*
Šeqal.	*Šeqalim*
Yeb.	*Yebamot*

Qumran/Dead Sea Scrolls

1QH	Hodayot (Thanksgiving Hymns)
1QM	Milḥamah (War Scroll)
1QS	Rule of the Community (1QS)
1QSa	Rule of the Community (1Q28a)
4QM	4Q491 (War Scroll variant; cf. 1QM)
4Q174	4QFlorilegium
4Q504	4QWords of the Luminaries

Other Jewish and Christian Writings

Add. Dan.	Additions to Daniel
Add. Esth.	Additions to Esther
Apoc. Mos.	Apocalypse of Moses
Bar.	Baruch
2 Bar.	2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse)
3 Bar.	3 Baruch (Greek Apocalypse)

1 Clem.	1 Clement
Comm. 2 Cor.	Pelagius, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*
Comm. 2 Cor.	Theodoret of Cyr, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*
Comm. Paul's Ep.	Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on Paul's Epistles*
Deut. Rab.	Deuteronomy Rabbah
Eccl. Hist.	Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*
1 En.	1 Enoch (Ethiopic Apocalypse)
2 En.	2 Enoch (Slavonic Apocalypse)
Ep.	*Epistle*/*Letter*, by the named author
1 Esd.	1 Esdras (in the Apocrypha)
2 Esd.	2 Esdras (= 4 Ezra)
Exod. Rab.	Exodus Rabbah
Gen. Rab.	Genesis Rabbah
Hom. 2 Cor.	John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians*
Hom. Gen.	John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*
Hom. Heb.	John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews*
Hom. in 2 Cor. 11:1	John Chrysostom, *Homily on 2 Corinthians 11:1*
Hom. Lev.	Origen, *Homily on Leviticus*
Jdt.	Judith
Jos. Asen.	Joseph and Aseneth
Jub.	Jubilees
Let. Aris.	Letter of Aristeas
Let. Jer.	Letter of Jeremiah (= Bar. 6)
1–4 Macc.	1–4 Maccabees
Midr. Tadshe	Midrash Tadshe
Odes	Odes of the Greek Church et al. (in Rahlfs, *Septuaginta*, vol. 2)
Ord. Levi	Ordinances of Levi
Pr. Azar.	Prayer of Azariah (Odes 7)
Pr. Man.	Prayer of Manasseh (Odes 12)
Pss. Sol.	Psalms of Solomon
Sg. Mos. Deut.	Song of Moses in Deuteronomy (Odes 1)
Sib. Or.	Sibylline Oracles
Sipre Deut.	Sipre Deuteronomy
Sir.	Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
T. Ab.	Testament of Abraham
T. Iss.	Testament of Issachar
T. Job	Testament of Job
T. Jud.	Testament of Judah
T. Levi	Testament of Levi
T. Naph.	Testament of Naphtali
T. Reu.	Testament of Reuben
T. Sim.	Testament of Simeon
T. Sol.	Testament of Solomon
Tob.	Tobit
Wis.	Wisdom of Solomon

Classical Writers

Aem.	Plutarch, *Aemilius Paullus*
Ages.	Plutarch, *Agesilaus*
Agr.	Cicero, *On the Agrarian Law*
Alex.	Plutarch, *Alexander*
Ant.	Plutarch, *Antonius*
Antid.	Isocrates, *Antidosis* (*Oration 15*)
Aph.	Hippocrates, *Aphorisms*
Apoph. lac.	Plutarch, *Apophthegmata laconica*
Arch.	Cicero, *Pro Archia*
Att.	Cicero, *Epistles to Atticus*
Bell. civ.	Appian, *Civil Wars*
Bell. Mith.	Appian, *Mithridatic Wars* (in *Roman History*)
Ben.	Seneca, *Benefits*
Brut.	Cicero, *Brutus*
Caes.	Plutarch, *Caesar*
Cat. Maj.	Plutarch, *Cato the Elder*
Cat. Min.	Plutarch, *Cato the Younger*
Catullus	Catullus, *Poems*
Cic.	Plutarch, *Cicero*
Cleom.	Plutarch, *Cleomenes*
Comp. Pel. Marc.	Plutarch, *Comparatio Pelopidae et Marcelli*
Comp. Thes. Rom.	Plutarch, *Comparatio Thesei et Romuli*
Controv.	Seneca the Elder, *Controversies*
Cor.	Demosthenes, *On the Crown*
Cor.	Plutarch, *Marcius Coriolanus*
Crass.	Plutarch, *Crassus*
Cyn. Ep.	Diogenes of Sinope (?), *Cynic Epistles*
Cyr.	Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* (*The Education of Cyrus*)
De or.	Cicero, *De oratore* (*The Orator*)
De pace	Demosthenes, *De pace* (*On the Peace*)
De re milit.	Vegetius, *De re militari* (*On Military Matters*)
Dep. Schol.	Lucian of Samosata, *The Dependent Scholar*
Dial.	Tacitus, *Dialogues*
Disc.	*Discourses*, by the named author
Ep.	*Epistle*/*Letter*, by the named author
Ep.	Seneca, *Moral Epistles*
Epid.	Hippocrates, *Epidemics*
Fab.	Plutarch, *Fabius Maximus*
False Emb.	Demosthenes, *False Embassy*
Fam.	Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* (*Letters to Friends*)
Flam.	Plutarch, *Titus Flamininus*
Fug.	Lucian of Samosata, *Fugitivi* (*The Runaways*)
Geogr.	Strabo, *Geography*
Gymn.	Philostratus, *Gymnastica* (*Gymnastics*)
Hell.	Xenophon, *Hellenica*

Hermot.	Lucian of Samosata, *Hermotimus* (*Rival Philosophies*)
Hist.	Herodotus, *Histories*
Hist.	Polybius, *The Histories*
Hist. Rom.	Livy, *History of Rome*
Inst.	Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* (*The Orator's Education*)
Issues	Hermogenes of Tarsus, *Legal Issues* (*Staseis*)
Jupp. trag.	Lucian of Samosata, *Juppiter tragoedus* (*Zeus Rants*)
Leg.	Plato, *Leges* (*Laws*)
Leg. Man.	Cicero, *Pro Lege Manilia*
Leis.	Seneca the Younger, *To Serenus on Leisure*
Libyca	Appian, *Carthaginian Affairs* (in *Roman History*)
Lucil.	Seneca the Younger, *Moral Letters to Lucilius*
Lyc.	Hyperides, *Pro Lycophrone*
Mach.	Athenaeus Mechanicus, *On Machines*
Mar.	Plutarch, *Marius*
Marc.	Porphyry, *Letter to His Wife, Marcella*
Max. princ.	Plutarch, *Maxime cum principibus philosophiam esse*
Med.	Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*
Mor.	Plutarch, *Moralia*
Mulier. virt.	Plutarch, *Mulierum virtutes* (*The Virtues of Women*)
Nat.	Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*
Nub.	Aristophanes, *Nubes* (*Clouds*)
Off.	Cicero, *De officiis* (*On Duties*)
1–3 Olynth.	Demosthenes, *1–3 Olynthiac*
Op.	Hesiod, *Opera et dies* (*Works and Days*)
Or.	*Orations*/*Speeches*, by the named author
Pel. War	Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*
Phil.	Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*
Phoen.	Euripides, *Phoenician Maidens*
Plac. philos.	Pseudo-Plutarch, *Placita philosophorum* (*Opinions of Philosophers*)
Plat. Q.	Plutarch, *Platonic Questions*
Pol.	Aristotle, *Politics*
Pol.	Plato, *Politicus* (*Statesman*)
Pomp.	Plutarch, *Pompeius*
Pun.	Appian, *Punic Wars*
Pyth. Life	Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*
Quaest. conv.	Plutarch, *Quaestionum convivialum libri IX*
Quaest. nat.	Plutarch, *Quaestiones naturales*
Quint. fratr.	Cicero, *Letters to His Brother Quintus*
Rect. rat. aud.	*Plutarch, De recta ratione audiendi* (*Listening to Lectures*)
Regum	Plutarch, *Sayings of Kings and Commanders*
Rep.	Cicero, *The Republic*
Res. gest.	Augustus, *Res gestae divi Augusti* (memorial inscription)
Resp.	Plato, *Respublica* (*Republic*)
Rhet.	Aristotle, *Rhetoric*

Rhet. praec.	Lucian of Samosata, *Rhetorum praeceptor* (*Professor of Public Speaking*)
Rom. Ant.	Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*
Rom. Q.	Plutarch, *Roman and Greek Questions*
Sat.	Juvenal, *Satires*
Sert.	Plutarch, *Sertorius*
Soll. an.	Plutarch, *De sollertia animalium* (*On the Intelligence of Animals*)
Symp.	Xenophon, *Symposium*
Ti. C. Gracch.	Plutarch, *Tiberius et Caius Gracchus*
Tib.	Suetonius, *Tiberius*
Val. Max.	Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*
Verr.	Cicero, *The Verrine Orations*

Transliteration

Hebrew

א	ʾ	ָ	*ā*	*qāmeṣ*
ב	*b*	ַ	*a*	*pataḥ*
ג	*g*	ַ	*a*	furtive *pataḥ*
ד	*d*	ֶ	*e*	*sĕgōl*
ה	*h*	ֵ	*ē*	*ṣērē*
ו	*w*	ִ	*i*	short *ḥîreq*
ז	*z*	ִ	*ī*	long *ḥîreq* written defectively
ח	*ḥ*	ָ	*o*	*qāmeṣ ḥāṭûp*
ט	*ṭ*	ֹ	*ō*	*ḥōlem* written fully
י	*y*	ֹ	*ō*	*ḥōlem* written defectively
כ/ך	*k*	וּ	*û*	*šûreq*
ל	*l*	ֻ	*u*	short *qibbûṣ*
מ/ם	*m*	ֻ	*ū*	long *qibbûṣ* written defectively
נ/ן	*n*	ָה	*â*	final *qāmeṣ hēʾ* (בָּהּ = *āh*)
ס	*s*	ֶי	*ē*	*sĕgōl yōd* (בֶּי = *ēy*)
ע	ʿ	ֵי	*ē*	*ṣērē yōd* (בֵּי = *ēy*)
פ/ף	*p*	ִי	*î*	*ḥîreq yōd* (בִּי = *îy*)
צ/ץ	*ṣ*	ֲ	*ă*	*ḥāṭēp pataḥ*
ק	*q*	ֱ	*ĕ*	*ḥāṭēp sĕgōl*
ר	*r*	ֳ	*ŏ*	*ḥāṭēp qāmeṣ*
שׁ	*ś*	ְ	*ĕ*	vocal *šĕwāʾ*
שׂ	*š*			
ת	*t*			

Notes on the Transliteration of Hebrew

1. Accents are not shown in transliteration.
2. Silent *šĕwāʾ* is not indicated in transliteration.
3. The spirant forms ב ג ד כ פ ת are usually not specially indicated in transliteration.
4. *Dāgēš forte* is indicated by doubling the consonant. Euphonic *dāgēš* and *dāgēš lene* are not indicated in transliteration.
5. *Maqqēp* is represented by a hyphen.

Greek

α	*a*	ζ	*z*	λ	*l*	π	*p*	φ	*ph*
β	*b*	η	*ē*	μ	*m*	ρ	*r*	χ	*ch*
γ	*g*/*n*	θ	*th*	ν	*n*	σ/ς	*s*	ψ	*ps*
δ	*d*	ι	*i*	ξ	*x*	τ	*t*	ω	*ō*
ε	*e*	κ	*k*	ο	*o*	υ	*y*/*u*	῾	*h*

Notes on the Transliteration of Greek

1. Accents, lenis (smooth breathing), and *iota* subscript are not shown in transliteration.
2. The transliteration of asper (rough breathing) precedes a vowel or diphthong (e.g., ἁ = *ha*; αἱ = *hai*) and follows ρ (i.e., ῥ = *rh*).
3. *Gamma* is transliterated *n* only when it precedes γ, κ, ξ, or χ.
4. *Upsilon* is transliterated *u* only when it is part of a diphthong (i.e., αυ, ευ, ου, υι).

THE ROMAN EMPIRE IN THE FIRST CENTURY AD

Introduction to 2 Corinthians

In a monograph on 1 Corinthians, Stephen Pogoloff (1992: 273) writes, "As historians, we search for clues to further enrich and constrain our imaginations in order to revise our narrative both to satisfy our critical convictions and to provide more meaningful readings of the text." Normally, the introduction to a critical commentary seeks to organize such "clues" around topics such as authorship, date, destination, and structure—presenting the facts, or at least reasonable speculations, offered by scholars toward a more intelligible reading of the text. "And this we will do if God permits." But I want to start our study by inviting you into an imaginative reading of the story behind 2 Corinthians, a story grounded in the data both *behind* (the cultural and historical backdrop of Corinth) and *within* the biblical book. Pogoloff's words describe the "historical" dimensions of this bit of historical fiction, which I'm using to serve a pedagogical purpose by pulling us into Corinth of the mid-first century, a place of vivid sights and smells, powerful cultural dynamics, and heated relational tensions. In the balance of the introduction, we will sort out which aspects of the narrative rest on a firm historical footing, but for now, enter with me into the world of Paul's Corinth.

As he stepped onto the gravel of the Lechaeum road, heading south from the Asclepion back to the forum, Stephanas was still a bit rattled by the meeting, not used to such a confrontational discussion with such a powerful man. "Why in the world does Lucius want to meet at the Asclepion?" his wife, Alba, had wondered that morning as they had breakfast in the garden. From the slight rise on which their Craneum neighborhood sat, the view of Corinth spread out before them in all its vastness like a giant patchwork quilt draping the landscape, flowing down to the Lechaeum port.

Stephanas loved this city. It was flourishing, and his business had flourished along with it. The wild mix of travelers, tourists, merchants from all of the world, ports crammed with exotic goods, new buildings going up as the great men tried to outdo each other, their wonderful, plentiful baths and springs, their enviable sewage system. . . . Horace had written, "It is not the privilege of every man to visit Corinth."[1] But here Stephanas lived. He perhaps was not one of the elite, but as a successful merchant Stephanas felt great pride in this wealthy city of thousands. There were the desperately poor, of course,

1. Horace, *Ep.* 17.36.

a number of them now associated with the church, but opportunities for the population generally were greater in Corinth than in most places. And since Paul had come with the gospel, Stephanas saw his place and his prosperity—his purpose in the world—in a very new light.

Of course Stephanas knew why Lucius Domitius Felix had chosen the Asclepion. It was a lovely place, the complex dedicated to the healing god. Stephanas had attended weddings there from time to time. Out from the city center and near the northern wall, the temple grounds were beautifully groomed, comfortable, and quiet. But there was more. It was an obvious way of pushing back, not even a veiled attempt at pushing back. When Paul's letter had arrived last year, Lucius had heard it read and then read it himself. In that letter the apostle had answered many of the church's pressing questions, including the one about eating meat from a temple. So Lucius was quite aware of Paul's perspective. The Asclepion was a nice place to eat, of course, one of the nicest in the city. But the temple meat roasting in that temple was not the draw for Lucius. No. The Asclepion was a defiant retreat of sorts at which to talk about Lucius's ongoing "concerns" about Paul, concerns that had been building ever since the "undignified tentmaker," who "dirtied his hands with manual labor," had refused Lucius's patronage.

So as he kicked gravel along the Lechaeum road, some 400 paces farther into the city's heart, he thought back through the day and how that difficult conversation had unfolded. That morning Stephanas had walked from home to the city center to conduct business before the meeting. Having passed Maximos's tavern on his left, he entered the Forum from the southwest end. He had greeted Erastus briefly. The city treasurer, walking briskly past the area in front of Apollo's and Aphrodite's temples, was on his way to an office in the South Stoa, weaving through a crowd of shoppers, priests, tourists, and merchants heading in all directions. The Forum, almost 200 paces long and some 125 paces deep on the west end, was massive by anyone's estimation, a wide-open space of buzz and bustle. As he continued, Stephanas made a quick stop at a banker in one of the Forum's center shops, and then on to a jeweler to pick up a gift for his daughter Theodora, whose twelfth birthday was coming up on Kalends Octobris (Oct. 1).

He had seen Achaicus and Chloe talking just across the Forum's east end, near the Peirene Fountain. Stephanas made his way over to them and told them about the meeting that was to take place with Lucius, asking for prayer. Each of the three had been staunch defenders of Paul and had spoken out boldly during Titus's recent visit. Following that gut-wrenching letter from Paul, they had drawn most of the house churches firmly to the apostle's side. But none of them embraced the illusion that tensions in the church were laid to rest. Matters were so complex, so difficult to work through, what with people coming and going in the household groups throughout the city and region. The church was still very young, not quite five years old, and the blend of classes, education, cultural backgrounds, personalities, and levels of spiritual maturity could be dynamic but fragile. The majority of the house groups

in the city, as well as those from Tenea, Cenchreae, and Cromna, resolutely made a fresh commitment to the apostle and his mission. Unfortunately, the group at Crommyon had remained cold toward Paul (several who continued in sexually immoral behavior were in that house), as had the small group led by Lucius's steward and, of course, the group of students from the school of Alexandros, among whom was Lucius's oldest son. But generally, the response to Paul's heartrending letter had been positive, and Titus left two weeks later to give the apostle that news.

So this morning, as the sun had climbed toward noon, Stephanas had continued his walk toward the Asclepion, past the North Market and the Theater, out through blocks of shops and homes, finally arriving at his destination. Lucius had reserved a private room and had ordered food. He had with him David and Samuel, "wise professional speakers," as Lucius liked to refer to them, men who had even won some notoriety in rhetor competitions at the games last spring. They and a number of their disciples had arrived from the East two years ago, shortly before Paul had arrived in Ephesus, bringing with them recommendation letters from obscure church leaders back east. Like Apollos, David and Samuel obviously had advanced training in rhetoric; they were good speakers, by most standards of the culture. But unlike the Alexandrian, the content of their "preaching" always seemed "Spiritless," devoid of the gospel message and power. Though words about Jesus and the gospel were used at times, there was no substance to the teaching: no clear doctrine, no ethical foundations for living. Their speaking entertained but did nothing to promote mission, or righteous living, or community. It just seemed to focus mainly on the exalted Jesus as a means of glory, success, and status. Some had been taken in and were increasingly under their harsh influence, and now these impressive public speakers were aligned with Lucius.

The meeting had not gone well. The arguments against Paul, presented by Lucius and the other two, had sounded wonderfully reasonable; Stephanas had heard most of them before. They claimed that the church was acting unwisely, unreasonably. Paul's critics sounded hurt, offended by the apostle's arrogance, his inattention to social conventions, his teachings, and especially his "wishy-washy character." In short, they tagged Paul as a weak, ineffective leader who had brought on the current "crisis" in the church. David and Samuel appealed to Stephanas's Jewish background, a heritage they shared and of which they were very proud. Honestly, Stephanas felt bullied, cowed by the confrontation, glad when the meeting was behind him. Although the majority of the church were firmly committed to the apostle, these pockets of opposition were worrisome; powerful and gifted people were involved.

As he continued now back south, into the city's heart, Stephanas had business at his warehouse that called for his attention. He needed to check on a shipment of Italian lamps that should have arrived in port yesterday, and he wanted Crestus to follow up on an order of glazed bowls from the physician's consortium. Stephanas stopped at the public latrine and felt like visiting the baths, to wash away the tension of the last hour. If only dealing with

Paul's opponents could be so easy! He wished the apostle would come back to Corinth, or at least send another letter.

The danger of labeling something "historical fiction" is that the second word in the designation may be confused for the first—that is, reading fictional elements as historical. So let me sort things out a bit. In the preceding narrative, the descriptions of Corinth and the region to which it belonged are based on solid archaeological evidence, and the cultural climate of Roman Corinth has also been extensively studied by scholars, being drawn from both inscriptional evidence and other primary-source pieces of literature. References to the comings and goings of Paul, Timothy, and Titus—as well as Paul's ongoing correspondence with the Corinthians—are based on statements drawn from Acts, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and Romans. As explained below, the exact chronology of Paul's ministry has been greatly debated; attempting to put together the puzzle of his movements and length of stays in various places is a great deal of fun, though beastly difficult at points. Nevertheless, most of the general movements depicted in our narrative and the people involved as Paul's associates, including Achaicus and Chloe, rest on solid footing (if one is willing to accept the Acts accounts as well as the Corinthian Letters as historically reliable).

Erastus normally has been considered a believer, who also was a city official in Corinth, though some scholars have recently questioned whether he was really a believer, suggesting instead that he was simply a high-ranking friend of Paul (Friesen 2010). We know that members of the household of Stephanas were the first to respond to Paul's missionary outreach in the region (1 Cor. 1:16; 16:15) and that Stephanas himself later joined the apostle for a time in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:17). But beyond the fact that he had a "household" (which may point to a certain level of wealth) and was one of Paul's trusted associates in Corinth, we know nothing. Lucius is a completely fictional character, as are the public speakers, David and Samuel. We know that Paul had opponents in Corinth and have some knowledge of their patterns and concerns, but Paul purposefully does not dignify his opponents by naming them.

Thus the physical and cultural contexts of Corinth, the general development of Paul's interactions with the Corinthians, and the identity of some of his key associates from Corinth all rest upon historical fact. Other elements of my narrative, particularly the situation of Stephanas and Paul's opponents, embody dynamics in the Corinthian church that are hinted at in the NT but remain in the realm of speculation. So having walked the roads of Corinth in our imaginations, let us now discuss the typical introductory matters of this rich and difficult letter, beginning with a closer look at Paul, the letter's author.

Paul in Mid-First Century AD

The Greek term Παῦλος (*Paulos*), "Paul," stands as the first word in ΠΡΟΣ ΚΟΡΙΝΘΙΟΥΣ Β′ (*PROS KORINTHIOUS B*), the letter commonly known as

2 Corinthians. Most consider the letter's authorship to be undisputed, though debate swirls around virtually every other aspect of this complex book's background and content. Over the past two millennia the apostle Paul has been called many things by people, "most of them nasty," according to some (Crossan and Reed 2005: ix). Ernst Renan (1869: 126) famously labeled the apostle an "ugly little Jew." In contradistinction to Jesus, he often has been portrayed as the true "founder of Christianity as a new religion," a perverter of the Jesus movement (Klausner and Stinespring 1946: 303–4). Others have named him "A Radical Jew" (Boyarin 1994: title), "The Fifth Evangelist" (A. Hunter 1980: 1), "the thirteenth witness" (Burchard 1970: 173), the preeminent symbol of early Gentile Christianity (J. Becker 1989: 1), "the first Christian theologian" (Hengel and Schwemer 1997: 1), moreover "the greatest and the most influential of all Christian theologians" (M. Hooker 2003: 150), and even "the man-mountain" around which theologians have walked for centuries, a mountain never scaled (Horrell 2006: 1). Still others have embraced the apostle as an object of deep affection and even love (Bruce 1977: 15); in fact, early church father John Chrysostom confessed, "I love all the saints, but I love most the blessed Paul, the chosen vessel, the heavenly trumpet, the friend of the bridegroom, Christ" (*Hom. in 2 Cor. 11:1* 1 [15.301]).[2]

Second Corinthians presents us with the apostle's most deeply personal book, a book written in the heat and hurt of crisis, and one that delves most deeply into Paul's theology of Christian ministry. When he wrote 2 Corinthians, Paul probably had been a follower of Jesus Christ for a little over two decades. Morna Hooker (2003: 149) reminds us, "To understand Paul, we need to endeavour to see him, as far as is possible, in terms of his own time and situation, and to ask why he felt so passionately about his calling and why he reacted as he did." So let's review a few things about our apostle, moving from his broader context to the matters that define him more specifically, noting especially how these characteristics are reflected in 2 Corinthians.

Man of the Greco-Roman World

First, *Paul was a man of the Greco-Roman world and a citizen of the Roman Empire*. The apostle Paul was a man of his world, a world that had inherited a great many values, perspectives, and its common language from the Greeks, and one that was shaped, in terms of daily existence, by the political structures of the Roman Empire. His ability to communicate in the Greek language and Greek educational values played a part in making the apostle a man who could communicate well, even powerfully, with churches throughout the Mediterranean world, and he primarily used Greek translations of the Jewish Scriptures. But it was the Pax Romana, the "Roman Peace" established under the rule of Augustus, as well as the Roman roads and relatively safe sea travel (during sailing season) that facilitated the establishment of and ongoing communication with those churches.

2. As quoted in Mitchell 2000: 1; on John Chrysostom and Paul, see esp. 1–33.

Via Acts, Paul says that he was born a Roman citizen (22:27–28) and that citizenship protected Paul from certain forms of punishment and afforded him certain rights, which he often seized upon for the advance of the gospel (16:37–38; 22:26–29; 25:10–12; 26:32). In addition, Paul's Roman citizenship may have given him a certain level of credibility with leading men in Corinth, like Erastus (Rom. 16:23), for the city had been established in the previous century by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony, and the Corinthians still prided themselves on their connections to Rome. His citizenship may also have given Paul an advantage when he was brought up on charges by Jewish leaders in Corinth before the proconsul Gallio (Acts 18:12–17), who seems to have legally recognized the Christian movement, in tandem with Judaism, as a *religio licita*, which would have made the church's members exempt from normal imperial religious expectations (Winter 1999).

Acts also tells us that the apostle was a citizen of Tarsus in Cilicia (21:39; 22:3), one of the great educational centers of the world at that time. His upbringing in Tarsus, whose gymnasium was on the Cydnus River, probably gave Paul a grounding in a well-rounded education, perhaps even training in rhetoric (see Witherington 1995: 44–48), a supposition that seems validated in sections of text like 2 Cor. 10–13.[3] Strabo writes that the people of Tarsus had not only committed themselves to philosophy and education, exceeding even Athens and Alexandria, but they also loved learning and often completed their education abroad (*Geogr.* 14.5.12–13), as Paul did (Acts 22:3).

In addition Tarsus was known both for linen woven from flax grown in its fertile plain and for a local material called *cilicium*, woven from goats' hair and used to make materials that offered protection from cold and wet weather (Bruce 1977: 35). Thus the apostle may have learned the craft of tentmaking (Acts 18:3) in his hometown. With this skill the apostle was able to support himself in his travels throughout the Greco-Roman world. As an occupation, tentmaking was quiet, portable, and universally needed (Murphy-O'Connor 1983: 192). Paul would have been able to service people who were traveling by land or ship, hucksters who needed coverings for their wares, and shop owners or city leaders buying awnings for shops or public buildings in various cities around the Mediterranean (Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 19.23–24). Tentmaking would have been grueling and exhausting work (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8), but the craft would also have provided the apostle with opportunities to talk to people and preach the gospel. Paul may have even used his workshop at points as a house church (Murphy-O'Connor 1983: 195–96).[4] At the same

3. In most English translations (ETs) of 2 Cor. 11:6, Paul seems to deny that he has had formal training in public speaking. Yet, as explained in the comments on that verse, the word ἰδιώτης (*idiōtēs*, amateur) could be used to speak of those trained in rhetoric, who for the good of the community choose not to use that skill for personal advancement (Winter 2002: 224–25; e.g., Philo, *Agr.* 143; Isocrates, *Antid.* 201, 204).

4. There were several market areas in Corinth where Paul might have worked. The North Market, e.g., had been completed not long before Paul arrived in the city. Around a central square were forty-four shops. Paul seems to have lived and worked with Aquila and Priscilla

time, Paul's manual labor would have been disdained by some as unbefitting a gentleman and community leader. Cicero (*Off.* 1.150–51), for instance, contrasted intelligent work that makes a contribution to society with vulgar trades, suggesting that manual laborers live like mere slaves. This prejudice may be reflected in passages like 2 Cor. 11:7–11, where Paul defends his decision to refuse payment for his speaking services.

A Messianic Jew

Second, *Paul was Jewish and understood Judaism to have been fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah.* Although some scholars have suggested that Paul turned his back on Judaism, seen as a dark previous life set over against the real life he had after his Christian reorientation (e.g., J. Becker 1989: 34), recent scholarship, both Jewish and otherwise, has been increasingly aware of the apostle's Jewishness as key to his identity (Frey 2008: 285–88). Paul was a well-educated, widely traveled denizen of the Greco-Roman world and unarguably the key missionary to the Gentiles in the early Jesus movement. But the apostle's self-identity and his mission were driven by his Jewish heritage and understanding of the world. As one scholar states, "When Paul talks about his moorings, he boasts of his Jewish heritage and his learning in Judaism (Gal. 1.14; Phil. 3.5f.). Even after his conversion, he continues to think of himself as a Jew (2 Cor. 11.21–26; Rom. 11.1, 13f.)" (Koenig 1979: 38). Indeed, Paul converted from rejecting Jesus to confessing Jesus as Lord (Phil. 2:9–11), from a life dead in sins to a new-covenant life in the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:4–6; Rom. 8:1–4). Yet his conversion should not be seen as from "Judaism" to "Christianity," but from one type of Judaism to another (Frey 2008: 321). For Paul's Scriptures, his interpretive methods, his theology, and his goals for his mission all have their origin and foundation in the bedrock of his Jewish faith.

Paul describes himself as having been "zealous" for his ancestors' traditions, advancing the form of Judaism in which he had been raised (Gal. 1:13–14). He had been "circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; regarding the law, a Pharisee; regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless" (Phil. 3:5–6 HCSB). In 2 Corinthians he calls himself a Hebrew, an Israelite, and "the seed of Abraham" (11:22). He had grown up in the Diaspora and would continue to have connections with Tarsus in his adult life (Acts 9:30; 11:25), but he was trained, probably beginning in his teen years, in Jerusalem under the rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Paul founded churches throughout the Mediterranean world yet also interacted with and

when he arrived in Corinth (Acts 18:1–3). Normally a hired person slept in the workroom, while the owner slept with his family in the loft above. The shops of the North Market had a single unglazed window centered above the shop entrance (which was about 7.5 feet wide). The shops were of uniform size, 13 feet high, and about 12 feet deep. The width of a shop would be about 9–13 feet. Often there was a communicating window or door with the shop next door (Murphy-O'Connor 1983: 194–95).

raised support for the mother church back in Jerusalem (e.g., Acts 21:15–20; 1 Cor. 16:1–2; 2 Cor. 8–9), which for Jews was the center of the world.

In the mid-first century and in the wake of Claudius's edict expelling Jews from Rome, people like Priscilla and Aquila had almost certainly swelled the numbers of Jews in Corinth (J. Wiseman, *ANRW* 504). When he came to that city, the apostle "reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and tried to persuade both Jews and Greeks," confessing Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 18:4–5). Thus the apostle's missionary methods show a profound connection to his Jewish heritage and broader associations, and the connection is theological and biblical rather than merely pragmatic. Some synagogue members believed, including the leaders Crispus (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:14) and Sosthenes (Acts 18:17; 1 Cor. 1:1), but to a great extent the apostle's message was rejected by many of his Jewish discussants. Toward the end of his first visit to Corinth, Jewish leaders of the city attacked Paul, bringing him before Gallio, a tactic that failed miserably (Acts 18:12–17). Still later, at the end of his third visit to Corinth, the Jewish leaders again plotted against the apostle, causing him to change his plans for travel (20:3). But almost certainly, even by fellow Jews, Paul was not perceived as promoter of a religion other than Judaism. Rather, Gallio had it right. Paul's conflict with the Jewish synagogue in Corinth was an internecine struggle. Paul's gospel was grounded in the Jewish Scriptures and what God had done among his people in the promised land; his gospel was centered in the death and resurrection of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, and was for the Jewish people first. But Paul understood that not only were the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus decisive in the history of Israel; they also shaped the key eschatological event for understanding what God was doing in the world and thus reflect "a salvation-historical perspective in which the coming of Christ is seen to be the climactic fulfillment towards which the whole history of Israel has been leading" (Ciampa and Rosner 2010: 10). Ultimately, that salvation-historical perspective points beyond Israel to the whole of humanity.

A Uniquely Called Apostle

This brings us to our final point about Paul: within the early Jesus movement, *Paul was a uniquely called apostle and church planter, the preeminent Christian missionary to the Gentiles*. When Paul was confronted by Christ, his calling was unique, being both an "apostle" who was born "at the wrong time," that is, selected by Christ in a fashion quite out of step with the rest of the apostles (1 Cor. 15:8), and the apostle chosen specially to reach the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:8; 1 Tim. 2:7). We should not see this mission to the Gentiles as a pragmatic Plan B, launched upon Jewish rejection of Jesus as Messiah; rather, it should be understood as a part of God's comprehensive agenda, revealed in the OT and fulfilled in Christ (Goldsworthy 2000: 15). Paul Barnett, for instance, has pointed out that "Paul saw his own role more distinctly than any other leader we meet in the NT, apart from Christ himself. Based on the Damascus event and his subsequent career, Paul appears to

have regarded himself and his life's work in fulfillment of a number of OT texts," including Isa. 49:6; 42:6–7. The Isaiah passages, for instance, speak of a servant who is made a "light" to the nations (2 Cor. 4:6; Barnett 2008: 118–19). A nuanced reading of Paul's interaction with the Isaiah material suggests that Paul did not self-identify as Isaiah's servant but rather as a herald of the Servant, Jesus, thus as "a servant of the Servant" (Gignilliat 2007: 51–52, 108–42). That Servant's ministry would not be limited to the Jewish people but would have international impact, as expressed in Isaiah's prophecy and fulfilled in Paul's mission.

What, then, was at the heart of Paul's gospel service to the Gentiles? In Romans, Paul himself tells us of his agenda for his missionary ministry: "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles on behalf of his name" (Rom. 1:5 NET). Brian Rosner has suggested that this "obedience of faith" may be understood as centered in the glory of God, as we see, for example, in 2 Cor. 3:7–18 and 4:4–6. As demonstrated in the commentary on these passages, the theme of God's glory is complex and rich, speaking not only of the manifestation of God's presence and the proclamation of God's "fame," but also of the transformation of people so that they reflect God's character and values. Rosner (2011: 168) writes, "There is good evidence to conclude that divine glory is woven into the fabric of Paul's missionary theology and practice. It sets in motion his mission to the Gentiles, directs his missionary movements, interprets his experience of missionary suffering and gives focus to his aim to see believers transformed 'from glory to glory.'" Further, glory is brought to God and his people are glorified by God "having acted and . . . acting through Christ's life, death, resurrection/exaltation and present reign as Lord over all creation to set things right" (Ciampa 2011: 190). People who respond in faith to the good news found in Jesus Christ are delivered from both the guilt and the power of sin. They are justified and transformed by God's power, are set free, and foreshadow the very transformation of the heavens and the earth in the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Paul's missionary strategy centers on the simultaneous proclamation of this gospel and establishment of gospel-centered churches throughout the Mediterranean world. For reasons that become clearer as we learn about this intriguing ancient city, the apostle chose Corinth as a key station for the development of this mission.

The City of Corinth

Political and Cultural Backdrop

Corinth's history, development, and role in the ancient world owe a great deal to the city being strategically situated on an isthmus joining the Greek mainland to the Peloponnese.[5] In this attractive spot, the city began to flourish in the seventh century BC under Periander, a leader who governed Corinth

5. For general introductions on the ancient city of Corinth, see esp. J. Wiseman, *ANRW* 438–548; Murphy-O'Connor 1983; Engels 1990; and Thiselton 2000: 1–17.

around 625–583 BC, the same period when Jeremiah was carrying out his lament-filled, prophetic ministry under the shadow of Babylon's invasion of the land of Judah. Founding new colonies around the Mediterranean and thus increasing trade, Corinth grew in wealth and was on the rise as a major economic center.

Three centuries later, however, Corinth was caught in a political tug-of-war between Macedonia and the newly formed Achaian League. In 243 BC, Aratus of Sikyon liberated the city from a century of Macedonian domination and took it into the Achaian League. Yet just two decades later (222 BC), the city returned to Macedonian control (J. Wiseman, *ANRW* 451–54). When the Macedonians were defeated by the Romans in 197 BC, Corinth was returned to the Achaian League and played a significant role in the league through the first half of the second century BC. But the relationship between the Achaian League and Rome gradually deteriorated over that period. The Achaians interpreted the "freedom" they had been granted by Rome more literally, while the powers in Rome stayed politically engaged in the region. In Corinth and much of Greece, popular hostility against the Romans was on the rise. In 147 BC, the Romans sent an embassy to settle a dispute between Sparta and other members of the Achaian League. In a surprise move, the Romans suggested that many of the league's key cities, including Corinth, declare independence, effectively calling for the dissolution of the Achaian League, a proposal harshly rejected by the Greeks. The meeting ended when the Achaians angrily left the meeting and had all the Spartans arrested. Rome was insulted by this response to its "suggestion." Then at a critical meeting in the spring of 146 BC, the Achaian League declared war against Rome's ally, Sparta, which made war with Rome inevitable (J. Wiseman, *ANRW* 459–61). The Romans answered by sending the consul Lucius Mummius by sea and Metellus overland to crush the Greek rebellion. On the Isthmus of Corinth, a ramshackle army under the Achaian general Diaeus was destroyed by Mummius's larger and better-equipped force. Corinth was sacked and burned, many of its buildings destroyed, its men killed, and women and children sold into slavery. Thus Greek Corinth, "the Light of all Greece" (Cicero, *Leg. Man.* 5), came to an end (Engels 1990: 14–16).

After a century of desertion, the strategic position of the city was recognized by Rome, leading to Corinth's rebirth as a Roman colony. Refounded by Julius Caesar shortly before his assassination in 44 BC, the former site of the Greek city was named Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis (Colony of Corinth in Honor of Julius [Thiselton 2000: 3]). As noted by Strabo (*Geogr.* 8.6.23; Clarke 1993: 9–10), the population of the new Roman colony was made up largely of freedmen (those liberated from slavery),[6] as well as transplanted soldiers (*Geogr.* 17.3.15; Plutarch, *Caes.* 57.8), urban tradesmen, and laborers (Thiselton 2000: 3). Corinth seems to have become the administrative capital of the province in 27 BC (Gill 1994: 449) and thus was home to the proconsul

6. In Paul's day many inscriptions paid tribute to freedmen who had risen in the world and undoubtedly had an impact on Corinth's cultural climate (Savage 1996: 37).

(e.g., Gallio for one year during Paul's first sojourn in the city; Acts 18:12). Under Roman rule the city was governed by four magistrates (two *duoviri* and two *aediles*, all elected annually) and other city officials, along with a city council (Barnett 1997: 2). During the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius, the city again began to thrive economically and develop as a commercial capital of the region.

As a prominent Roman colony established to foster a reverence for Roman power and culture, the city would have been perceived on the surface to be "geographically in Greece but culturally in Rome" (Garland 1999: 21). Yet, on closer inspection, it seems that the colony was neither completely Roman nor Greek in cultural orientation.[7] In a recent monograph on the social and ethnic origins of Roman Corinth, Benjamin Millis (2010: 34–35) reflects:

> Corinth was a Roman colony: its political structure, its position within the province of Achaia, the architectural form of the city center, the layout of the colony, and not least its strong political allegiance were all wholly Roman. This very Roman city, however, had strong, even dominant, Greek roots, some of which were manifest in the mediating role Corinth played between east and west. This was a city and a population which was capable, whether consciously or not, of presenting different faces in different circumstances and contexts. The Roman face appears most obviously in public display in Roman contexts in the city center, where anything else would have been inappropriate and out of place. In sharp contrast, private contexts present a very different and notably Greek face. This conclusion is not meant to imply that the *romanitas* of the colonists was a veneer or a facade to be shed at will but that this group of people had found a way to navigate effectively between both worlds. . . . This was a city which presented itself as a new foundation while simultaneously laying claim to the past, providing a focal point for the mixing of Greek and Roman cultures at a major crossroads in the eastern Mediterranean. It was, in short, a nexus of old and new, conquered and conquerors, Greek and Roman.

Richard Oster (1992: 54) concurs: "It would be a grave error to suppose that the inhabitants of colonial Corinth lived in a setting which was mono-cultural and homogeneous at the time of nascent Christianity." This intersection of the Roman and Greek worlds was embodied in the city's unique geographical situation on the Isthmus of Corinth, which also contributed significantly to its rapid economic development in the first century AD.

Paul's Corinth: A Thriving, Wealthy City

Strabo attributed Corinth's great wealth to it being "master of two harbours" (*Geogr.* 8.6.20). The man-made port of Lechaeum, one of the largest in the

7. Latin was the dominant public language of Roman Corinth for at least the first 150 years of its existence (from 44 BC): Latin inscriptions outnumber Greek ones by a ratio of about 25 to 1. Only inscriptions related to the Isthmian Games, held every two years, are exclusively in Greek (Millis 2010: 23). Yet Paul's Letters were written in Greek, as were graffiti and various types of personal marks, including those of masons and manufacturers (Millis 2010: 26–29).

Roman world (only the ports at Rome, Ostia, and Caesarea were bigger), was roughly 1.8 miles north of the Corinthian forum and on the Gulf of Corinth (Engels 1990: 214n72; Murphy-O'Connor 1983: 16). The smaller port of Cenchreae lay a little less than 6 miles to the east, on the Saronic Gulf. Connecting these two gulfs, the isthmus measures just 3–4 miles wide at its most narrow point. The two ports thus served as a unique crossroads,[8] providing Rome with a shortcut[9] to the ports of Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean. Consequently, Corinth served as a major distribution center both for the Greek mainland and the Peloponnese. Goods could be imported and exported, both east and west, as well as north and south (J. Wiseman, *ANRW* 445–46). In this way, Corinth functioned as a major commercial intersection in the ancient world.

Immediately surrounding Corinth stood a zone of villas, gardens, and prosperous farmsteads, while further out from this zone, there were towns, villages, and occasionally isolated farmhouses (Engels 1990: 24). Within a fifteen-mile radius, those towns and villages, which had constant interaction with Corinth itself, included Nemea, Cleonae, Tenea, Examilia, Cromna, Cenchreae, Isthmia, Scheonus, and Crommyon. People in the broader region considered themselves Corinthians, identifying readily with their much larger neighbor.

Some have celebrated the fertility of Corinth's coastal plain (Furnish 1988: 17). Cicero (*Agr.* 1.5; 2.51) calls the land of Corinthia "most excellent and

8. A portage road, the Diolkos (= "across"), was built in the sixth century BC and was used at points to transport cargo from one gulf to the other. From ancient times there were plans to build a canal across the span (only the emperor Nero and, perhaps, Demetrius Poliorcetes actually initiated digging), but that dream was not realized until 1893 (J. Wiseman, *ANRW* 441–42). Almost all modern works on Corinth or the Corinthian Letters note the extensive use of the Diolkos and mention that ships were transported overland regularly, but this view has been called into question in a number of recent studies suggesting that the Diolkos was not used to transport ships (except on rare occasions, then mostly warships) and had a rather limited use in the transport of cargoes (e.g., Lohmann 2013; Pettegrew 2011). This does nothing, however, to reduce the importance of Corinth as a vast emporium serving as a conduit of merchandise between its two harbors and thus the two gulfs. Strabo (*Geogr.* 8.6.20) explains: "Corinth is called 'wealthy' because of its commerce, since it is situated on the Isthmus and is master of two harbours, of which the one leads straight to Asia, and the other to Italy; and it makes easy the exchange of merchandise from both countries that are so far distant from each other."

9. This route saved six days of sailing around the Peloponnese, avoiding the treacherous winds and currents of Cape Malea. Engels (1990: 50–51) notes that the winds in December and January often exceed Beaufort force 6 (over 30 mph), a hazardous condition for ancient ships, and even in summer, winds can reach that velocity 25–30 percent of the time. This is in the general vicinity where Paul's ship, bound for Rome, was caught in a violent storm (Acts 27:13–19) and driven all the way to Malta off Sicily. Again, Strabo (*Geogr.* 8.6.20) explains the strategic nature of Corinth as follows:

> And just as in early times the Strait of Sicily was not easy to navigate, so also the high seas, and particularly the sea beyond Maleae, were not, on account of the contrary winds; and hence the proverb, "But when you double Maleae, forget your home." At any rate, it was a welcome alternative, for the merchants both from Italy and from Asia, to avoid the voyage to Maleae and to land their cargoes here. And also the duties on what by land was exported from the Peloponnesus and what was imported to it fell to those who held the keys.

productive" and "rich and fertile." This almost certainly refers to the land west of the city, cut through by the Nemea River,[10] yet recent studies have shown that Corinth could not have subsisted on its agricultural base, but rather was oriented to service and trade (Engels 1990: 121–42). One of the driest sites in southern Greece, the Corinthia has an average annual rainfall of about fifteen inches; thus both streams and wells in the region can run dry in the summer months (Engels 1990: 12). Yet the city was exceptionally well supplied with water, having vast underground reserves, indeed, one of the most extensive watering systems in the ancient world (Landon 2003: 43). The Corinthians rightly celebrated their abundant supply of fresh drinking water, their baths and fountains, and their enviable sewage system.

Looming over the Corinthia region, the Acrocorinth sits just south of the ancient city, rising up over 1,800 feet. From its lower slopes on the north, Corinth spread north, across two descending plateaus, toward the port at Lechaeum (Lechaion). The heavy fortification wall, which originally surrounded the heart of the city, had been over 32,000 feet (6.2 miles) in circumference and anchored to the fortifications on the summit of the Acrocorinth.[11] The main part of the city covered an area of about 1.5 square miles (Murphy-O'Connor 1983: 58). In short, Corinth was a large, thriving city by ancient standards, with a population during Paul's day estimated at about 80,000, plus another 20,000 people in the rural areas outside the city (Engels 1990: 84); perhaps one-third of the population consisted of slaves (Garland 1999: 23). In addition, Corinth attracted not only merchants but also tourists and other travelers on a regular basis. Every two years the numbers of travelers making their way to the city swelled as large crowds were attracted to the Isthmian Games (Strabo, *Geogr.* 8.6.20), a popular religious and athletic festival involving, for instance, musical and literary competitions, contests in public speaking, contests involving horses (e.g., chariot races, skills in chariot driving, men leaping on and off both horses and chariots), various kinds of footraces, the pentathlon, and boxing. The festival was a boon to the Corinthian economy and image as a major tourist destination.

In the early 50s AD, when Paul arrived in Corinth, the city was at the pinnacle of its development and would have struck a visitor with its size, its beauty, and, perhaps most of all, its wealth (Strabo, *Geogr.* 8.6.23; Aristides, *Or.* 46.27; Alciphron, *Ep.* 3.24.3).[12] Impressive buildings and statues made of

10. Yet Strabo (*Geogr.* 8.6.23) describes the terrain immediately around the city and toward the Isthmus as "not very fertile, but rifted and rough; and from this fact all have called Corinth 'beetling,' and use the proverb, 'Corinth is both beetle-browed and full of hollows.'" Commenting on this, Murphy-O'Connor (1983: 66) reports, "The soil is thin, and erosion damage very noticeable; jagged edges of limestone project above the worn surface of the soft marl."

11. See esp. color figs. 3 and 7 in Gregory 1993: 16–18, which depict the original layout of the city by the Romans. By Paul's time the wall was in great disrepair, as were the two additional parallel walls that ran northward, connecting the city proper with its northern port on the Gulf of Corinth (Murphy-O'Connor 1983: 58; J. Wiseman, *ANRW* 440–41).

12. This context of wealth also was home to the egregiously poor. Alciphron (*Ep.* 3.60) comments, "I learned in a short time the nauseating behavior of the rich and the misery of the poor."

various hues of marble, exotic woods, and various kinds of stone and adorned with bronze would have been everywhere one turned. Some of the most impressive buildings would have been in the vicinity of the massive Forum, an area almost 600 feet long. Looking around, the visitor would have seen the huge South Stoa, the largest in the Roman world, which ran the length of the Forum, with the Acrocorinth rising up behind it. The North Stoa on the Forum's opposite side was not as long but was equally impressive. Engels (1990: 60) suggests that about 76,000 square feet of building space was devoted to stoas and shop structures in the central, excavated part of the city. At the Forum a visitor would have seen the Julian Basilica, temples to Apollo and Aphrodite, the Peirene Fountain, and the statue of Athena. Just off the Forum were the Archaic Temple and, to the west, the Temple of the Imperial Cult. Besides these, there were at least five public baths, numerous fountains, other temples, a library, lawcourts, latrines, rooms to rent, monuments to celebrated people, many schools, shops of various kinds, bronze works, pottery works, the Jewish synagogue (Acts 18:4), and large market areas. Making his way to the northwest of the Forum, our visitor might stop by the theater, which could seat 15,000 people. Out toward the Acrocorinth, this person may have walked by handsome homes adorned with mosaics and frescos. Throughout this bustling city, the visitor would see crowds of travelers, merchants, shoppers, worshipers, and tourists from Rome, Alexandria, Sardinia, North Africa, Italy, Spain, Syria, Judea, Anatolia, and from all over Greece.

Either at the warehouses near the ports, the warehouses in the city, or the market areas throughout the city, visitors might have encountered cooks, prostitutes, entertainers, doctors, barbers, travel guides, wagon drivers, leatherworkers, rope makers, bankers, merchants selling perfumes or ceramic goods, blacksmiths, jewelers, architects, tentmakers, bakers, farmers selling produce or animals, carpenters, masons, stonecutters, road builders, shoemakers, embroiderers, or those carrying out dozens of other occupations. People would have been able to buy every good imaginable, including spices, silks, imported wines (Williams 1993: 38), precious stones, olive oils, copper and tin ingots, clothing, and shoes (Engels 1990: 57–58). A visitor would have been able to worship at one of the many temples, get a haircut, wash at one of the public baths or even in a swimming pool, or eat a meal in a public tavern.

In short, the city was filled with a dazzling array of colors, smells (both pleasant and unpleasant), and experiences. The city was a large, international, pluralistic, wealthy center of commerce, and a political hub for the Roman Empire; these characteristics do serve as important backdrops for the interpretation of our letter. But to understand certain dynamics at play in 2 Corinthians, we also need to understand cultural values fostered in this ancient city, especially as they relate to leadership.

The Corinthian Context and Leadership Values

The Corinthian Letters make clear that the church in this impressive first-century city was racked with problems, and scholars increasingly attribute many

of the problems to the Corinthian cultural and social values by which the lives of these young believers had been shaped. In short, "many of their faults can be traced to their uncritical acceptance of the attitudes, values, and behaviors of the society in which they lived" (Ciampa and Rosner 2010: 4).[13] In 2 Corinthians, Paul seems especially concerned with misconceptions of leadership, a concern carried over from 1 Corinthians (1:12–17; 3:1–15; 4:1–7), as he vies for the authenticity and authority of his mission in the city. Momentarily and more specifically, we will address the identity of Paul's opponents in Corinth (see "Paul and His Opponents at Corinth" below), but here we seek to present the cultural value-set according to which those opponents apparently worked.

The Greco-Roman world celebrated the attainment of "glory" and "honor"[14] and emphasized the corresponding avoidance of "shame" in a leader of society. "Honor" has been defined as "the value of a person in his or her own eyes . . . *plus* that person's value in the eyes of his or her social group. Honor is a claim to worth along with the social acknowledgement of worth" (Malina 1983: 27), a concept also associated with "glory." If an individual had honor, that brought honor or glory to their family, clan, group, and city. Correspondingly, if a person was shamed by some activity or event or association, the shame transferred also to that person's associations. Denizens of Greco-Roman culture competed against one another (cf. 2 Cor. 10:12) for the attaining of honor so that they might rise in social status, in the public perception of worth. In fact, social competition for increased honor was a key element and a distinctive feature of Greek culture (Jewett 2003: 552).

Andrew Clarke (1993: 25) notes that, especially in an urban culture like Corinth's, "Social progression was inevitably the goal of most." People were bent on climbing the ladder of success, or more specifically for that society, "the ladder of social status"; so in line with their cultural values, the Corinthians were competing for social status. Many of the freedmen who had risen in status

13. Ciampa and Rosner (2010) cite Vander Broek (2002: 27–28), who states,

> Each of the community problems Paul needed to address grew out of the Corinthians' inability to let the gospel message fully reshape their gentile, Greco-Roman lives, whether because they misunderstood that message or because they rejected it outright. They were Hellenists through and through, and this eschatological, cross-centered, body-affirming Jewish sect called Christianity demanded that they enter another theological and ethical world. It is no surprise that these residents of Corinth would seek rhetorical wisdom, be unconcerned with immorality and the preservation of the body, be infatuated with asceticism and spiritual empowerment, and preserve the distinctions between rich and poor. The Corinthians were simply trying to be Christians with a minimal amount of social and theological disturbance.

Winter (2001: 43) points especially to the educational backdrop of the culture: "The Christian community was influenced by the secular educational mores of Corinth."

14. In 2 Corinthians, Paul does not specifically use the Greek term we normally translate as "honor" (τιμή), but the word does occur elsewhere in Paul, including Romans and 1 Corinthians (Rom. 2:7, 10; 9:21; 12:10; 13:7; 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 12:23–24). The antithetical word ἀτιμία is found at 2 Cor. 6:8 and 11:21. In 2 Corinthians Paul prefers to speak of δόξα (glory, e.g., 1:20; 4:15, 17; 6:8; 8:19, 23). He also uses δόξα extensively in 3:7–4:6; for the association of glory and honor in the Greco-Roman world, see, e.g., Plutarch, *Rom. Q.* 1.13; *Mulier. virt.* 16; *Cor.* 4.3.

through acquisition of wealth and position, still faced "status inconsistency" when compared to wealthy, high-status Romans (Pogoloff 1992: 273). So people in Corinthian culture desperately engaged in "boasting" and other forms of self-promotion to raise their own status or "glory" in the world (Thiselton 2000: 12–13).[15] Thus Witherington notes that "in Paul's time many in Corinth were already suffering from a self-made-person-escapes-humble-origins syndrome" (Witherington 1995: 20) and were seeking to overcome that syndrome.

Numerous factors contributed to a person's rank in the Greco-Roman world of the first century AD. A person's "power" referred to their ability to achieve certain goals in the society. Paul, by contrast, always places emphasis on God's power, even couched in the context of his own weakness (2 Cor. 1:8; 4:7; 6:7; 8:3; 12:9, 12; 13:4). Skill in rhetoric also could increase one's honor and status (Stansbury 1990: 278). Accordingly, that Paul was accused of poor public speaking was a way of shaming him (2 Cor. 10:10). Other dynamics that increased status included occupation, wealth or income, education and knowledge, religious or moral integrity, one's position in a family or ethnic group, or status in the local community (Meeks 1983: 54). Thus Paul in effect acts counterculturally when he chooses an occupation involving manual labor (11:7–9), denies income that would be provided by a patron (11:7), and downplays his own education (11:6). It may be that his opponents sought to lessen his status by questioning his moral integrity (1:12, 17) and his status as an apostle (11:5). Perhaps some in Corinth were struggling with Paul because his actions and patterns of leadership did not reflect a person seeking high status in Corinth's cultural milieu. In fact, he preached that true "glory," rather than being possessed by a gifted few, was for all believers and was a result of knowing Christ (3:17–18).

Finally, the Corinthians of the first century were enamored with wealth as contributing to one's social status. They were "impressed with material splendour and intent on raising their standing in the world," and, among other things, were famous for being "'ungracious . . . among their luxuries' (Alciphron, *Ep.* 3.15.1) and for 'assuming airs and priding themselves on their wealth' (Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 9.8)" (Savage 1996: 36). In short, for the Corinthians wealth was a preeminent value, tied to getting ahead in the world, and this was true especially for those who aspired to leadership in the society (Clarke 1993: 25, 39). Clarke (1993: 10–11) has shown that the leadership structure in Corinth was made up of wealthy political leaders who provided massive resources to fund all kinds of civic needs, and they did this to advance their own popularity and power. Thus leadership was expensive and elitist. One moved up the ranks of leadership and power by having money and spending it on those under one's leadership. So it is not difficult to see why Paul

15. From the Corinth agora, e.g., the inscriptions to Babbius provide a good example of benefaction and self-promotion: "Gnaeus Babbius Philinus, aedile and pontifex, had this monument erected at his own expense, and he approved it in his official capacity of duovir" (as quoted in Murphy-O'Connor 1983: 27).

did not measure up to the cultural ideals. Not only does Paul reject financial remuneration for himself, but he also asks the rank-and-file members of the church to contribute money for the collection in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8–9)! Given their cultural background, this must have seemed odd to many of the relatively new believers in Corinth.

Based on his extensive study of leadership patterns in the Corinthian context, Clarke (1993: 129) asserts that the Corinthians were using "secular categories and perceptions of leadership in the Christian community." In short, in the apostle's seeming humility (even humiliation, 12:21), his taking on the role of a servant, his rejection of patronage and the concomitant rejection of financial gain, and his refusal to advance his status by use of rhetorical skills, he stood in violation of key leadership values and principles embedded in the Corinthian culture. The apostle, on the other hand, presents to the Corinthians an alternative: a theocentric and biblical vision of authentic leadership.

Paul's Relationship with the Corinthians

As we read 2 Corinthians, it seems these tensions with the Corinthians had come to a head. Before probing those tensions further and addressing how Paul seeks to address them in our letter, we need to review the apostle's history with this church, placing the historical moment of this letter's production in historical context.[16] What follows is one possible scenario based on the data we have in Acts and our two extant Letters to the Corinthians. Admittedly, this recounting of events is rather "tight," and the apostle may have stayed in certain locations for additional months or an additional year. Nevertheless,

16. In this running account of Paul's movements (following the chart below), I have placed the dates in italics so the reader can track the progression more easily. On Pauline chronology, see Jewett 1979a (in its other iteration as Jewett 1979b); Hyldahl 1986; Riesner 1998; D. Campbell 2002; and for 2 Corinthians specifically, the introductions of the major commentaries. Beyond "anchor" events such as Paul's interaction with Gallio (Acts 18:12–17) and places at which we are given specific reference points from the annual calendar (e.g., 1 Cor. 16:8; Acts 20:6), the normal seasons for shipping offer some help in determining the apostle's movements, though Paul seems to have traveled during periods that were less safe, and sea travel always had its hazards (2 Cor. 11:25b–c). Hesiod said no one should sail except for fifty days a year, in July and August (*Op.* 663–65). Although Hesiod is quite conservative, the heart of the main shipping season consisted of the summer and a few weeks before and after it. Through much of the year, the seas were mostly deserted, and the ports went into hibernation. In general, shipping shut down from mid-November to mid-March; from September 14 to November 11 and from March 10 to May 27 were periods also considered very dangerous for travel by ship (Vegetius, *De re milit.* 4.39; Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 2.47). Paul normally seemed to spend the winter months away from the road (Riesner 1998: 308–9). The rabbis advised travel by sea only between Pentecost and the Feast of Booths (May to the end of October). Storms were certainly a problem on the seas, yet in an age when sailors plotted their courses by landmarks or the sun by day and the stars by night, visibility was an even greater concern. Cloudiness in fall or spring was a serious threat, since ships could drift off course and wreck in unknown waters. Consequently, good weather was critical. In addition, during the summer months Mediterranean winds are northerly (i.e., coming from the north), which would make for a quick trip from Rome to Alexandria, e.g., but would work against a ship traveling north from Alexandria to Rome (Casson 1974: 150).

the itinerary below offers a reasonable sequence of events in the apostle's interaction with the Corinthian church.[17]

A Chronology of Paul's Interaction with the Corinthians

spring 50 (March?)	Paul arrives in Corinth for the first time.
summer 51 (July?)	Paul is brought before Gallio.
autumn 51 (September?)	Paul leaves Corinth, sailing for Syria, arriving by mid-October.
late spring 52 (May?)	Paul arrives in Ephesus for a period of extensive ministry.
summer or autumn 52	Paul receives news of the Corinthians and writes the "Previous Letter" (1 Cor. 5:9).
autumn 52	Apollos joins Paul in Ephesus.
summer/autumn 53	Paul writes 1 Corinthians and sends it to Corinth (Timothy sent to Macedonia).
early spring 54	Timothy arrives in Corinth, finding the church in disarray.
late spring 54 (May?)	When shipping opens, Paul travels to Corinth for the "sorrowful visit" (2 Cor. 2:1), then returns to Ephesus.
summer 54	In Ephesus, Titus reports to Paul, who writes the "sorrowful letter" (2 Cor. 2:3–4).
late summer 54 (Aug.?)	The riot in Ephesus precipitates Paul leaving the city after teaching for two years and three months (Acts 19:8–10).
autumn–winter 54/55	Paul ministers in Troas, then Macedonia, where he writes 2 Corinthians.
winter–autumn 55	Paul evangelizes in Macedonia and Illyricum (Rom. 15:19).
autumn/winter 55	Paul makes his way back through Macedonia to Greece.
January–March 56	The apostle stays for three months in Corinth and writes Romans.
spring 56 (end of March?)	A plot causes Paul to abort a trip back to Syria by sea and reroute travel through Macedonia.
April 56	Paul sails, leaving Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Acts 20:6) on a trip that takes him back to Jerusalem, where he is taken into Roman custody.

The Church Established

Paul probably arrived in Corinth the first time early in *AD 50*, perhaps in *March*,[18] when winter weather would have given way to the beginnings of

17. The identification of specific months in the chronology are meant to be suggestive rather than exact, mere approximations, but at points they are based on normal shipping seasons. Dates such as when Paul arrived in Ephesus the first time or the length of Paul's ministry in Macedonia and Illyricum are debated and could add months or years to this chronology. Also, Luke's language is notoriously inexact when dealing with periods of time. When in Acts 18:18 he says that Paul stayed "quite a few days" (ἡμέρας ἱκανάς, *hēmeras hikanas*), e.g., does that mean something like a few weeks or a few months? What we present here, then, is an approximate chronology, meant to be suggestive of the general time frames surrounding the apostle's ministry.

18. March AD 50 + eighteen months (Acts 18:11) + "quite a few days" (18:18) would still allow Paul to sail in fall of 51.

spring, making travel south from Macedonia to Greece easier. The apostle lived with Priscilla and Aquila, who shared his occupation of tentmaking and who had recently been expelled from Rome under the Edict of Claudius (Acts 18:2–3). Most scholars date the expulsion in AD 49 or the first month of AD 50 (Jewett 1979b: 36–38). Silas and Timothy came south from Macedonia and joined Paul in the Corinthian ministry. Together they founded the church through the preaching of the gospel (Acts 18:5; 2 Cor. 1:19). The result was that "many of the Corinthians, when they heard, believed and were baptized," including a prominent man named Titius Justus and Crispus, the synagogue leader (Acts 18:7–8 HCSB). After ministering in Corinth for over a year, in *summer of AD 51* Paul was brought before Gallio at the judgment seat in the Forum. Gallio served as proconsul of Greece from July 1 in AD 51 to June 30 in 52 (Murphy-O'Connor 1983: 164–69). Perhaps the Jewish leaders in Corinth brought the apostle before the proconsul in *July*, shortly after Gallio took office, thinking the new administrator might be sympathetic to their concerns (cf. Acts 25:1–2). They were mistaken (18:14–16).[19] After Paul had stayed on in Corinth for a number of days, he, Aquila, and Priscilla sailed to Ephesus from the port at Cenchreae, perhaps in *late September 51* (18:18). He then sailed on to Caesarea, traveling from there up to Jerusalem and arriving by *mid-October*.[20] This ended what we normally refer to as the "Second Mission Journey."

The Move to Asia

From Jerusalem, Paul traveled north to Antioch in *late fall of 51*, shortly after the time that eloquent Apollos took up his ministry in Corinth (Acts 19:1). The apostle then traveled on through South Galatia and Phrygia, visiting the churches there (18:22–23) before moving to set up residence in Ephesus. The trip from Jerusalem to Ephesus (1,120 miles) would have taken sixty to ninety days on foot. But with wintry conditions (in the Taurus range and the Anatolian highlands), Paul would have had to overwinter somewhere, and he did spend some time in ministry. So he probably reached Ephesus in *late spring of the year AD 52* (Riesner 1998: 313). Priscilla and Aquila were already in the city, having been left there by Paul at the end of the previous mission trip (Acts 18:18, 21). For the first three months in Ephesus, the apostle preached boldly in the Jewish synagogue. But then he moved to the lecture hall of Tyrannus and spent two years of exceptionally powerful and productive ministry there as all Asia heard the Word of God preached (19:8–20). After Paul was established in Asia, perhaps that first *summer or fall* in Ephesus, he received news of the Corinthians and wrote them "not to associate with sexually immoral people" (1 Cor. 5:9). At some point during the Ephesian ministry, he was

19. Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue in Corinth, was beaten in front of the judge's bench (Acts 18:17) and later came to Christ (1 Cor. 1:1), as had Crispus, the leader who preceded him (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:14).

20. Riesner (1998: 313) suggests that it would have taken no more than about fourteen days for Paul to travel from Corinth to Caesarea.

joined by Sosthenes (1 Cor. 1:1), as well as Stephanas, Fortunatus, Achaicus (16:17), Timothy, and Erastus (Acts 19:22; 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10). As early as *autumn of 52* (or as late as *spring of 53*), Apollos, after just a few months of ministry in Corinth, had left the city and joined Paul in Ephesus, perhaps due to the factionalism inspired at least in part by his ministry (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4–6, 22; 4:6; 16:12).

1 Corinthians

About halfway through his time in Ephesus, in *summer or early autumn 53*, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, and he may have sent the letter by ship with Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, or perhaps with Titus (2 Cor. 8:6, 16–17) before sea travel closed for the season (1 Cor. 16:17; Furnish 1984: 28). This was before the apostle had made definite plans to carry the collection to Jerusalem personally (16:3–4). At the time of writing, Paul planned to stay in Ephesus until after *Pentecost of 54* because the ministry was going so well (16:8–9), but he was also open to an earlier trip if necessary (4:18–19). So his plan was to visit the Corinthians after traveling through Macedonia in *late spring or early summer of 54*. He hoped to stay with them perhaps through the winter months of the following year (AD 54–55; 1 Cor. 16:5–9). Part of the purpose of Paul's trip to Corinth was to take up a collection for the believers in Jerusalem (16:1–4). In the meantime, perhaps in *autumn of 53*, before he sent 1 Corinthians by ship, Paul sent Timothy on a trip, probably through Macedonia, that would include Corinth. But he anticipated that the letter would reach them first (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10–11).

A Painful Visit and a Painful Letter

Evidently, when Timothy arrived in Corinth, perhaps in *early spring of 54*, things were not well in the church, and at least some of Paul's directions in 1 Corinthians had not been acted upon. There were, for instance, those who continued to be involved in sexual immorality and divisiveness (2 Cor. 12:21). The false teachers were gaining in influence (as is clear from the opponents reflected in 2 Corinthians; e.g., 10:2, 12; 11:19–21). So it is possible that as soon as shipping opened in *late spring of 54*, Timothy headed to Ephesus to report to his apostle (or perhaps he sent a letter). Paul immediately left for Corinth for a grievous, crisis visit (2 Cor. 2:1–2),[21] which disrupted his previously made plans of traveling first through Macedonia before going to Corinth (1 Cor. 16:5–6). Perhaps during this visit Paul told the Corinthians that he would return to them in the months to come, travel on to Macedonia, and then come back through their city on his way to Judea.[22] The apostle may

21. It would have taken Paul anywhere between three to four days and two weeks to get to Corinth from Ephesus (Casson 1974: 150–51).

22. The other alternative is that the crisis visit is the first leg of the plan of which Paul speaks in 2 Cor. 1:15–16, with the apostle cutting the trip short by heading back to Ephesus early (Hafemann 2000: 86). This is an attractive position, but the problem with this view is twofold. First, if Paul left Corinth for Ephesus, instead of continuing on to Macedonia, his plan reflected in

have seen in the Corinthian situation a need to spend more time with a church in crisis. Yet his expressed purpose for this planned double visit to Corinth was to receive financial help for the trip to Macedonia and, on the way back through Corinth, to receive help for the trip to Jerusalem, offering the Corinthians a double opportunity to participate in giving (2 Cor. 1:15–16). Yet those plans never materialized.

During this crisis visit to Corinth, the apostle experienced emotional turmoil and even humiliation; in short, the confrontation with the church was deeply painful, though Paul was patient even as he warned those who were living in sin (2 Cor. 2:1–4; 12:21; 13:2). Either before or shortly after he traveled back to Ephesus,[23] the apostle was openly attacked, and the majority of members in the church failed to respond appropriately by defending their apostle (2:5–11).[24] As noted by Fee (1978: 538), Paul now had two problems: First, he needed to set things right with the church in Corinth. Second, he needed to follow through in a way that would not jeopardize the collection for Jerusalem.

So to address the first problem, in the *summer of 54, the apostle sent Titus to Corinth with the painful letter* mentioned in 2 Cor. 2:3–4. In this letter he may have informed the church that he had changed back to his original travel plans and would not be visiting them before going to Macedonia (1:15–16). Rather, Paul planned to go through Macedonia and then to Corinth to accomplish the second need related to the collection (2 Cor. 8:19), in effect returning to the previous itinerary mentioned in 1 Cor. 16:5–6. Thus Paul "resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem" (Acts 19:21 HCSB). At that time he also sent Timothy and Erastus on ahead to Macedonia (19:22). As these plans solidified in the apostle's mind and heart, he evidently had changed his mind about allowing the Corinthians to appoint those who would deliver their part of the collection to Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:3), for there is no mention of such representatives in 2 Cor. 8:16–24.

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2 Cor. 1:15–16 was changed at that point. Yet Paul makes clear that the motive for the change was to avoid a second painful visit to Corinth. This is possible, but it seems awkward that he would speak of a second visit while still on the first. Second, the crisis visit was probably made in haste, with the apostle not having ample opportunity to wrap up his ministry in Ephesus, for the itinerary of 2 Cor. 1:15–16 has little place for Paul to resolve ministry needs and responsibilities in Corinth before going back to Jerusalem (although he could have stopped briefly near Ephesus, as reflected in Acts 20:17–38).

23. Harris's position, that the offender denounced Paul after the apostle had traveled back to Ephesus, makes good sense. As Harris (2005: 226–27) points out, it seems less likely that Paul "had ignominiously retreated to Ephesus, an insulted and broken man, only later to accomplish by letter and the intervention of his delegate Titus what he had earlier failed to achieve in person." If Paul had experienced a public collapse and retreat, the threat of his impending visit in 2 Cor. 13:10 would ring quite hollow. Further, the apostle's assurance to Titus at 7:13–15 would have fallen flat in the face of such a failure in Corinth.

24. It is most likely that the apostle was attacked by a person who had high social status, which would explain why most of the congregation was shocked into silence, failing to confront the attacker until after the reception of the sad letter (2 Cor. 2:4).

Transitions and the Writing of 2 Corinthians

Late in the summer or early fall of 54, a little over two years after Paul had arrived in Asia (Acts 19:10), the situation in Ephesus deteriorated, as reflected in Acts 19:23–41. Luke does not tell us about the "affliction" Paul experienced in Asia (2 Cor. 1:8–11), but it is a viable option to conclude that it happened during this "major disturbance about the Way" (Acts 19:23; see the comments on 2 Cor. 1:8). Regardless, that uproar caused by Demetrius and the craftsmen seems to have precipitated Paul's departure from the city (Acts 20:1). The apostle left Ephesus, ministering in Troas for a brief time (2 Cor. 2:12). While there he had evidently expected to meet Titus, who was returning from delivering the painful letter; not finding his young protégé, the apostle continued on to Macedonia (2:12–13). As Paul describes this period, he had no rest in his spirit but was troubled and fearful (2 Cor. 7:5–7); understandably, he would have still been traumatized by the experience of his severe "affliction" during which he had stared death in the face (1:8). The apostle finally found emotional relief and God's comfort in Titus's arrival (in Philippi?), for the young man brought a generally good report concerning the Corinthians' response to the painful letter (7:7–13).[25] He also must have met Timothy at about this time (2 Cor. 1:1) in Macedonia and started what may have been a multiweek process of *writing 2 Corinthians, perhaps in the fall or winter of 54*, a little over a year after the church had received 1 Corinthians (2 Cor. 8:10). In winter or early spring, the apostle sent Titus, along with two other brothers (2 Cor. 8:16–24), to Corinth with 2 Corinthians.

Ministry in Macedonia, Illyricum, and Corinth

At Acts 20:2 Luke records, "and when he had passed through those areas and exhorted them at length, [Paul] came to Greece" (HCSB). For the sake of space, Luke often telescoped his narrative, omitting material that did not concern him (Keener 2012: 101), and he seems to do so here. For Paul took time to write a rather lengthy letter, and he sent a team bearing that letter ahead to Greece.[26] Since Paul stayed in "those areas" after writing the letter, it is reasonable to conclude that he was carrying out ministry there, especially since Luke tells us he "exhorted them at length" (Acts 20:2). But from a brief statement in Rom. 15:19b, it seems that the apostle also journeyed west to the region of Illyricum to preach the gospel there (so Bruce 1990: 93; P. Walker

25. Generally speaking, Titus's report had been encouraging. The younger minister had been received well and could speak of the Corinthians' conformity to Paul's wishes and their "longing" for the apostle (e.g., 2 Cor. 7:7, 15). At the same time, some of them had been offended by the severe letter he had sent (7:8), and his back-and-forth approach to his travel plans did not inspire confidence (Furnish 1984: 141).

26. Doing so, the apostle evidently wished to accomplish at least two things. First, he was seeking to thwart the work of his opponents (2 Cor. 11:12–15) and restore the Corinthians to a full commitment to his apostolic mission (7:2; 10:6; on which see below). Second, he exhorted the Corinthians not only to restart the collection but also to complete it (8:11; 9:3–4), which would have taken time.

2012: 8–10; Keener 2012: 248)[27], and such travel and ministry would have taken time. In that passage, written from Corinth once Paul arrived back in Greece, the apostle states, "As a result, I have fully proclaimed the good news about the Messiah from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum" (HCSB). Allan Chapple (2013: 35) concludes that "Illyricum" here refers to Dalmatia (southern Illyricum), that Paul ministered there for at least several months, and that his mission to the Roman province[28] of Illyricum was meant as a prelude to the apostle's ministry in Rome, perhaps even a preparation for ministry in Spain. Such a time in Latin-speaking Illyricum would have put the Roman church on his heart, which would then explain his soon-to-be-written Letter to the Romans from Corinth.

It seems at least possible, then, that Paul spent the next year, from *the winter of 54–55* and through *autumn of 55* ministering in Macedonia and Illyricum. Given his normal practice, the apostle probably had fellow workers with him from Macedonia (and perhaps other places, as he moved west (2 Cor. 9:4; Acts 20:4). After ministering in Illyricum, he probably passed back through Macedonia on his way to Corinth, for he seems to have arrived around *the beginning of January 56*, an unlikely time for a sea voyage south along the western coast of the peninsula. The apostle then spent three months in Corinth, from *January to around the end of March 56*, and wrote the book of Romans during that time. Luke tells us that Paul had planned to set sail for Syria, perhaps after sea travel opened in mid-March, but the plan was thwarted due to the Jewish leaders' plot against him in Corinth (Acts 20:3). So Paul and his ministry team traveled back to Macedonia instead, leaving Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread and eventually making their way to Jerusalem (20:7–21:15). As far as we know, Paul never again visited the church in Corinth, although 2 Tim. 4:20 hints that he may have.

The Letter We Call 2 Corinthians: Its Form and Purpose

One Letter, Two, or More?

Thus far in the introduction, we have written of 2 Corinthians as a single "letter," sent at a particular time. The reality is, however, that since the time

27. See esp. Jewett and Kotansky's excellent discussion (2007: 911–14) of καὶ κύκλῳ μέχρι τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ (*kai kyklō mechri tou Illyrikou*) in Rom. 15:19, lit., "and in a circle until Illyricum":

> My chronology allows several months for this in the summer and fall of 56 C.E. after meeting Titus in Macedonia (2 Cor 7:5–16); the later tradition of the Pauline school associated Titus with Dalmatia, which is part of Illyricum (2 Tim 4:10). The founding visit to Illyricum would have immediately preceded Paul's return for the final winter in Corinth—when Romans was written. Since Paul usually missionized in important urban centers, it is likely that he worked in Epetium, Salona, Tragurium, or Scodra, of which the latter would have been most easily accessible from Macedonia. (2007: 913–14)

28. Chapple (2013: 20) argues that Paul's reference in Rom. 15:19 is not just to the Illyrian region, on the north side of the western section of the Via Egnatia, from the vicinity of Lychnidos to the Adriatic, as with, e.g., Hengel and Schwemer 1997: 261.

of Johann Salomo Semler in the late eighteenth century (Semler 1776),[29] and especially since Adolf Hausrath's (1870) short monograph on 2 Corinthians a century later (ET of the title: The four-chapter letter of Paul to the Corinthians), many scholars have seen this work as a patchwork of more than one letter, pieced together by an editor once all the parts had been written. At a number of places in the letter, the transitions, either in subject matter or tone, seem abrupt. For instance, based on the shift in tone at 10:1, many have suggested that our 2 Corinthians was redacted out of two letters, chapters 1–9 and chapters 10–13. Still other "fragments" have been identified in relation to 2:14–7:4 (the earliest "letter," some suggest), 6:14–7:1 (which some do not believe is Pauline), and in relation to chapters 8 and 9 (which some understand to be two distinct letters). The suggestions vary widely,[30] but it is common to divide the letter into two, or as many as five, or even six fragments.[31]

Although space does not allow a thorough treatment of all the proposed theories, some of their aspects will be addressed in the exegetical reflections of the commentary. Nevertheless, at this point it may help to briefly summarize the most common reasons for assessing 2 Corinthians as a composite of multiple letters by considering the most commonly proposed divisions.

1. *The seams at 2:13/2:14 and 7:4/7:5*. In 1894 (513–14) Johannes Weiss first suggested that 2 Cor. 1:1–2:13/7:5–16 constituted a single, independent letter. More recently, L. L. Welborn (1996: 583) defended Weiss's proposal on the basis of the coherence of 1:1–2:13 and 7:5–16, analyzed in terms of Greco-Roman literary thought and practice. Welborn concludes that the two passages were originally contiguous, vindicating Weiss in his assessment. Welborn's (1996: 562–69) strongest argument has to do with the continuity of the material from 2:12–13 to 7:5, in which he points out that the parallelism and even the shifts from singular to plural and from πνεῦμα (*pneuma*, spirit) to σάρξ (*sarx*, flesh) are not compelling arguments against the original juxtaposition of these passages (as suggested, for instance, by Garland 1999: 34). Welborn is correct, of course, that parallelism and repetition form a part of good Greek style. However, elements arranged to craft parallelism may at times be "distant," separated by intervening text, to mark or set off movements in a discourse. This is the case, for instance, with the uses of inclusio peppered throughout the book, as well as occurrences of what I have referred to as "parallel introductions" (4:1//4:16; 11:30–31//12:1–3; 12:14//13:1).

Moreover, distant parallels at times can be used in biblical literature to resume a topic that had been abruptly left earlier in a work. In Hebrews, for

29. As Betz and MacRae (1985: 4) detail, the groundwork for Semler's study was laid by his teacher, Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten, whose commentary on the Corinthian letters Semler published posthumously.

30. For an overview of the discussion on partitioning theories, see Bieringer 1996b; Furnish 1984: 30–48; Martin 1986: xl–xlvi; Peterson 1998b: 39–51; and the extensive treatment by Harris 2005: 8–51.

31. For a five-letter hypothesis, see, e.g., E.-M. Becker 2004: 66; and for a six-letter proposal, note Taylor 1991: 71.

instance, each shift from exposition on Christ to hortatory material and then back to exposition on Christ is marked by "distant hook words" (that is, words used at the end of one section of exposition and at the beginning of the next section of exposition to "stitch" the two units together thematically). Thus, as the author returns to his christological discussion after a brief hortatory unit, he picks up where he left off in the previous christological argument (Guthrie 1994: 96–99).[32] Rather than an indication of document "fragments," this use of parallelism thus forms a particular literary strategy.[33]

We may well suggest that Paul's departure from his travel narrative at 2:14 and that narrative's resumption at 7:5 also has a strategic literary purpose.[34] The apostle leaves the Corinthians "hanging" with his restless departure for Macedonia recounted at 2:12–13. He does not resume the narrative until 7:5 for at least three reasons. First, the section of text on "authentic ministry" at 2:14–7:4 constitutes the heart of 2 Corinthians, as the apostle offers a robust defense of authentic Christian ministry. The interruption of his travel narrative serves to set off, and thus draw special attention to, that section of text.[35] Second, that treatment of "authentic ministry" in 2:14–7:4 has a great deal to do with the tensions and suffering inherent in following Christ through the world (e.g., 4:7–18; 5:1–10; 6:3–10), and the ministry moment *before* the coming of Titus embodies that tension and suffering. Thus the bracketing of 2:14–7:4 with statements about lack of rest at 2:13 and 7:5 are entirely in accord with a key characteristic of authentic ministry. Third, we may further suggest that Paul delays the happy resolution of tension found in the coming of Titus until (our) 7:5–16, because he was not yet ready to talk about the collection (chaps. 8 and 9), a topic in which the younger minister figures prominently (8:6, 16–24; 9:3–5). Thus the coming of Titus (7:6), as well as the happy news

32. This happens in Hebrews at 1:14/2:5; 2:17–18/4:14–16; and 5:10/7:1. In each case there are also hook words that tie each unit of exposition to the hortatory unit that immediately follows it, and the hortatory unit to the unit that resumes the exposition.

33. In Hebrews, e.g., the author introduces Jesus's appointment as high priest in the order of Melchizedek at 5:1–10, but then shifts abruptly to an extended hortatory section (5:11–6:20). Following the exhortation, he resumes his treatment of the Son's appointment by focusing on the superiority of Melchizedek (7:1–10; Guthrie 1998: 252). The resumption of the earlier exposition is clear and purposeful, riveting the audience's attention on the need for the exposition that has already been introduced (Heb. 6:1–3). Ancient preacher John Chrysostom (*Hom. Heb.* 12, on Heb. 7:1–10, in PG 63:423) recognized the rhetorical effect, noticing that, following the blistering though mitigated exhortation of 5:11–6:20, the hearers of Hebrews would have listened attentively to the speaker when he resumed his discussion of Melchizedek at Heb. 7:1.

34. In the commentary, by appealing to Quintilian (*Inst.* 4.3.14–17), we suggest that Paul uses a form of digression, to rivet the attention with supportive but varied material. Welborn (1996: 566–67) denies that the category is appropriate in this case, but he suggests that specific terminology and procedure should be followed with a true digression. However, we may recognize that while Paul draws on certain rhetorical techniques, he does not seem compelled to follow them slavishly but shapes them to his own purposes. Quintilian notes many ways of digressing.

35. As Quintilian (*Inst.* 4.3.14–17) explains, digressions "serve to refresh, admonish, placate, plead with, or praise the judge." Here Paul makes a personal and theological case for the authenticity of his ministry.

he brought, news that allowed Paul to praise the Corinthians exuberantly (7:7, 11, 13–16), paved the way for a renewed emphasis on the collection.

In addition, as has often been noted, reading a decisive break between 2:13 and 2:14 and between 7:4 and 7:5 seems ill-advised given the continuity between 2:12–13 and 2:14–17 and between 7:4 and 7:5–16. With the former "seam," we have the hook words or themes of "Christ" (2:12, 14), travel (2:12–13, 14), preaching (2:12, 14, 17), and the message preached (2:12, 14). At 7:4 and 7:5–16 we find the themes of "confidence" (7:4, 16), "boasting" (7:4, 14), "encouragement" (7:4, 7, 13), and "joy" (7:4, 13), as well as a description of Paul's afflictions (7:4, 5). The idea that an editor crafted 7:4 specifically to smooth a transition back into 7:5 and following should be seen as "a counsel of desperation," to use Thrall's (1982: 109–10) nicely turned phrase. Contra Welborn (1996: 577), it certainly cannot be fairly claimed that "2:14–7:4 . . . is unrelated to its present context." At both its beginning and ending, the section weaves seamlessly into what goes before and what follows, however abrupt these seams may seem on the surface. In short, the material at these seams satisfies Welborn's criteria of continuity and connectedness. Thus we reject the view that reads 2:14–7:4 as an interposed letter fragment inexpertly embedded in 2 Corinthians.

2. *The "interpolation" at 6:14–7:1.* Some scholars have argued that the unit at 6:14–7:1,[36] coming near the end of the apostle's treatise on authentic ministry, is either the fragment of a letter that Paul mentions in 1 Cor. 5:9 (e.g., Hurd 1965: 135–39; Jewett 1978: 389–444), or a fragment that did not originate with Paul at all (e.g., Betz 1973: 88–108;[37] Fitzmyer 1961). The objections raised against this part of 2 Corinthians are, for instance, that it doesn't fit logically into the flow of argument for the whole letter, or that it does not match the apostle's other writings, having a great number of hapax legomena and correspondences to the Qumran literature.

But with its treatment of pagan temple worship, others have read the passage as profoundly integrative with the surrounding material (see esp. Scott 1992: 217–20; as well as Beale 1989; Goulder 1994a). In fact, Paul's call for a "moral conversion" (Matera 2003: 160) of a church so inundated with the

36. In 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1 Paul presents a highly crafted, logically developed series of exhortations, with various types of support material. Rhetorical questions, theological assertion, and a string of OT quotations having to do with restoration—all work to reinforce, or provide the bases of, or restate the exhortations and call the Corinthians to separate from worldly relationships, which defile them and hurt their relationship with God. Paul wants them to be restored to the true worship of the living God, mediated through the apostle's mission.

37. Betz (1973: 108) suggests that the fragment originated with Paul's opponents and concludes:

> Paul must have been the embodiment of everything that the Christians speaking in 2 Cor 6:14–7:1 warned against. For them, his "freedom" from the law must have been nothing but the committing of those who followed him to the realm of Beliar and the turning of Christ into a "servant of sin" (Gal 2:17). In fact, the Paul of Galatians, building the entire salvation by God upon "faith" and "Spirit," looks very much like a radical pneumatic, not far from gnosticism. The conclusion is unavoidable that the theology of 2 Cor 6:14–7:1 is not only non-Pauline, but anti-Pauline.

values of its Greco-Roman context, one can argue, quite literally strikes at the "heart" of the Corinthians' need (cf. 12:21)—if they are indeed going to open their hearts in a fresh way to their apostle (6:11–13; 7:2–4). Their "affections" hold them back (6:12), and Paul addresses their affections through this string of OT texts on restoration to the true worship of God.

Further, as James Scott (1992: 216) has pointed out, since the combination of Scripture citations forms a unity within 6:14–7:1, and the use of Scripture we find here stems from a Christian perspective, the Qumran proposal begins to fade in credibility.[38] Further, at 5:20–21 Paul calls for the Corinthians to "be reconciled to God" on the basis of the gospel, in which "we might become the righteousness of God" in Christ. As Thrall (1977: 144–46) observes, this reference to God's righteousness and the appeal not to receive God's grace in vain (5:21–6:1) anticipate very particularly the content of 6:14–7:1, with its call to holy living. The passage, in fact, should be seen as an appropriate and resounding climax of the apostle's call for the Corinthians to recommit themselves to his ministry, for the path to full reconciliation with him and the path to full restoration to the true worship of God are one and the same.

3. *2 Corinthians 8 and 9 as separate letters.* A number of scholars have argued that chapters 8 and 9 constitute two letter fragments.[39] Bultmann (and Dinkler 1985: 256), for instance, states that 2 Cor. 9 could not possibly follow chapter 8 for the following reasons. (1) The phrase at 9:1, Περὶ μὲν γὰρ τῆς διακονίας (*Peri men gar tēs diakonias*, Now on the one hand about this ministry) clearly forms an introduction of a theme just taken up, whereas chapter 8 has already been treating the theme. (2) The description τῆς διακονίας τῆς εἰς τοὺς ἁγίους (*tēs diakonias tēs eis tous hagious*, this ministry to God's people; lit., the saints/holy ones) is odd given the fact that Paul has already described the ministry clearly in chapter 8. (3) The περισσόν μοί ἐστιν τὸ γράφειν ὑμῖν (*perisson moi estin to graphein hymin*, it is redundant for me to write to you further) again sounds as if a new theme is being initiated. (4) That 9:2 describes the eagerness of the Corinthians as boastworthy does not match chapter 8, where the Macedonians are the ones who serve as the model. This seems backward to Bultmann, who thinks chapter 9 must have been written first. And finally, (5) 8:20 depicts a different purpose for sending the brothers than does 9:3–5. The former suggests that Paul's motive had to do with guarding his nonembezzling reputation; the latter points to the practical work of gathering the collection. Yet Bultmann admits that these verses could be reconciled.

In spite of such concerns, a strong case can be made for the unity and yet the unique functions of chapters 8 and 9 in the development of 2 Corinthians. For instance, Stowers (1990), who investigates ninety uses of περὶ μὲν γάρ

38. Scott (1992: 216) takes on the alleged Qumranisms directly.

39. Thus, e.g., Bornkamm 1965: 31–32; Betz and MacRae 1985: 141–44; Jewett 1978: 389–444; Georgi 1986: 17; Bultmann and Dinkler 1985: 256. The proposals concerning when and why each letter was written vary widely. For an overview, see Taylor 1991: 69n2.

outside the NT, makes a strong case that 9:1 actually refers back to the content of chapter 8. Also, Garland (1999: 400) has pointed out an extensive inclusio bracketing the beginning and end of 8:1–9:15, pointing to the two chapters as a literary unit. To his list of five elements we add four others:[40]

τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ (*tēn charin tou theou*, the grace of God; 8:1; 9:14)
δίδωμι/δωρεά (*didōmi/dōrea*, I give/gift; 8:1; 9:15)
δοκιμή (*dokimē*, test; 8:2; 9:13)
ἡ περισσεία/περισσεύω (*hē perisseia/perisseuō*, the overflow/I overflow; 8:2; 9:12)
ἁπλότης (*haplotēs*, generosity; 8:2; 9:11, 13)
κοινωνία (*koinōnia*, sharing; 8:4; 9:13)
διακονία (*diakonia*, ministry; 8:4; 9:12–13)
δέησις/δέομαι (*deēsis/deomai*, request/I request; 8:4; 9:14)
ἅγιος (*hagios*, saint; 8:4; 9:12)

These extensive parallels provide further evidence of the literary unity of 2 Cor. 8–9, and movements within these two chapters show continuity. For example, as will be explained further in the commentary, 8:16–9:5 deals with Titus's mission. Having dealt with the "who" of the trip in 8:16–24, the words of 9:1–5 offer an explanation of "why" Paul has sent these brothers on ahead to deal with the collection. The section comprising 9:6–15 then offers encouragement by treating both the resources that God will provide the Corinthians for their giving and the promised results. Thus, it is ill-advised to depict these two chapters as somehow separate entities.[41]

4. *The "break" between chapters 9 and 10*. Of course, one of the most obvious shifts in 2 Corinthians comes at the transition from chapter 9 to chapter 10; the view that chapters 1–9 and 10–13 constitute two separate letters is widely held and published (Taylor 1991: 68). Some who hold this view believe the first nine chapters were written first and the final four sometime later, perhaps after Paul had received additional, disturbing news from Corinth (e.g., Furnish 1984: 44–45; Martin 1986: xlvi). Others suggest that the content of 10–13 mark it as the earlier production, perhaps the sorrowful letter mentioned in 2:3–4 (e.g., F. Watson 1984; Taylor 1991: 71).

40. Garland (1999: 400) does not include the following (with two parallels based on cognate relationships) in his list: δίδωμι/δωρεά, *didōmi/dōrea*, I give/gift (8:1; 9:15); δέησις/δέομαι, *deēsis/deomai*, request/I request (8:4; 9:14); ἅγιος, *hagios*, saint (8:4; 9:12); κοινωνία, *koinōnia*, sharing (8:4; 9:13).

41. Betz and MacRae (1985: 142) have carried out one of the most extensive analyses of the two chapters. Though they conclude that the content of chaps. 8 and 9 point to two separate letters, they believe that they may have been sent at the same time, one addressing Corinth and the other Achaia generally. But as Murphy-O'Connor (1991b: 78) has suggested, Betz and MacRae have demonstrated only that these two sections of the book formally follow the pattern of administrative letters in dealing with an administrative issue, the collection for the saints.

Generally, those who hold the two sections apart as separate letters point out the positive tone of chapters 1–9, replete with expressions of joy, relief, and confidence in the Corinthians, in contrast to the harshness of 10–13. How can the "I am glad to say that I have complete confidence in you!" of 7:16 be reconciled with the sobering warning of 12:20, "For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I will find you to be not the sort of 'you' I want you to be," and with the exhortation of 13:5, "Test yourselves to see whether you are in the faith!"? It seems, then, that in contrast to the first nine chapters of the book, the final four seem full of "jarring sarcasm, violent self-defence, fierce accusation of others" (R. Hanson 1961: 16). Further, Furnish (1984: 30–32) notes that while the earlier chapters of the book do not make reference to an impending visit (indeed, they explain why Paul had *not* come to visit!; 1:15–16), the final chapters of the book speak straightforwardly about the apostle's intention to travel to Corinth. Also, chapters 1–9 seem to speak of an earlier visit of Titus (7:7, 14), but the latter chapters imply a second visit of the young minister (12:18a). Also, the latter chapters, with their acerbic tone, would destroy the goodwill that Paul sought to build with the friendly, conciliatory tone of chapter 9. Finally, Furnish (1984: 30–32) suggests, chapters 1–9 are filled with use of the first-person plural, whereas chapters 10–13 have Paul speaking in the first-person singular.

Yet the position that chapters 1–9 and chapters 10–13 form a unified letter has always had its champions,[42] and there seems to be a current trend back toward viewing the book as a unity (Harris 2005: 42–43).[43] Numerous arguments have been marshaled in this direction (e.g., Garland 1999: 38–44; Harris 2005: 42–51; Hall 2003: 86–128; Long 2004). For instance, the abrupt change in tone can be explained variously. Paul may have been traveling when he started composition, and the writing of the letter may have taken days if not weeks. Perhaps the apostle received an alarming report from Corinth that caused him to shift the tone of the letter's end rather decisively. Once a letter was prepared, adjustments could be made. For instance, in one of his letters Cicero says, "I wrote to you above that Curio was very cold; well, he is warm enough now; . . . he had not done so before I wrote the first part of this letter" (*Fam.* 8.6.5). In fact, "It was not uncommon for an author's tone to change

42. See the helpful history overview of those defending the unity of the book in Betz and MacRae 1985: 27–35. Betz's treatment largely focuses on German scholarship, but it demonstrates well that a significant contingent of critical scholars have found partitioning theories on 2 Corinthians to be less than convincing.

43. It is often recognized that no existing textual tradition presents 2 Corinthians as anything other than a unified whole (Hall 2003: 86), and that we have no patristic evidence that the book is made up of fragments. This is true and has some significance. We must take seriously the form of the document we have before us. However, since the earliest data on the existence of 2 Corinthians we have comes in the mid-second century, with allusions in Polycarp and an inclusion of the book in Marcion's canon (Harris 2005: 2–3), it leaves open the possibility that another form or forms of the book existed very early in the collection process. Such a view, however, apart from the literary theories mentioned above, remains pure speculation since 2 Corinthians has come down to us as a whole.

or his opinion to shift in a postscript. Something happened, news arrived, the situation shifted, and the author needed to clarify, modify or change his view on the matter. A writer needed to soften (or stiffen) his tone in light of some new information" (Capes, Reeves, and Richards 2007: 79).

A number of recent works, however, have suggested that Paul's abrupt change in tone at 10:1 was rhetorically strategic, rather than merely circumstantial, as the apostle turned to focus quite specifically on his opponents in Corinth. Leaving such an offensive until the end was rhetorically appropriate (e.g., Young and Ford 1987: 28, 37–38, 43–44; Danker 1991; Hall 2003: 89–91; Witherington 1995: 429–32). For instance, Demosthenes, toward the end of his *Second Epistle*, shifts the tone of his work to address his opponents directly (Young and Ford 1987: 37). In his final movement he writes, "Now thus far I am appealing to you all, but for those in particular who are attacking me in your presence I wish to say a word" (*Ep.* 2.26; N. W. De Witt and N. J. De Witt 1949: 225). He goes on to argue that the enmity of certain men should not be allowed to prevail (*Ep.* 2.26). This form of apology has at least some analogy to 2 Corinthians, in which Paul continues to address the church generally but foregrounds his opponents in a heated defense from chapter 10 onward.[44]

Others have not only answered the alleged contradictions between chapters 1–9 and 10–13 but have also demonstrated the extensive continuity between the two sections of the letter in terms of vocabulary and controlling themes (see esp. Barnett 1997: 19–23;[45] Harris 2005: 44–51;[46] Garland 1999: 40–44).[47] Moreover, James Scott (1998: 5) has observed that the discourse flow of 2 Corinthians has three main movements, each preparing for Paul's third visit to Corinth in a different way. Chapters 1–7 present a rigorous defense of the authenticity of his apostolic ministry in the face of criticisms leveled against him (e.g., 1:12–2:13), the difficulty of his second visit (2:1–11), and the opponents in the community (2:17; 5:12; 6:8; 6:14–7:1). Thus Paul spends a good bit of time reflecting on the difficulties of recent months, seeking full reconciliation with

44. The complexity of the Corinthian church has at times been given too little attention in discussions of the letter's complicated makeup. It should not be surprising that a church spread throughout a large city, and perhaps throughout the broader region in which that city was located (see the comments at 1:1 on σὺν τοῖς ἁγίοις πᾶσιν τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Ἀχαΐᾳ, *syn tois hagiois pasin tois ousin en holē tē Achaia*, along with all God's holy people throughout Achaia), would have various factions (1 Cor. 1:10–11!) and subgroups that the apostle may need to address in various ways.

45. Barnett (1997: 18–19), e.g., observes that throughout the letter, Paul makes powerful appeals to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 5:20–6:2; 6:11–7:1; 10:1–2; 12:11–13; 13:5–11); foreshadows his upcoming visit, when he will correct some attitude or action in the church (2:1, 3; 9:4; 10:2, 6; 11:9; 12:14, 20, 21; 13:1, 2, 10); and uses distinctive vocabulary.

46. Harris (2005: 47–48), e.g., notes verbal echoes from chaps. 1–9 in 10–13 at 3:9/11:15 ("ministry of righteousness"); 2:17/12:19 ("we speak before God in Christ"); 1:17/10:2 ("from worldly motives"); 6:13/12:14 ("to/for children"); 3:2/12:11 (on endorsement); 4:2/12:16 (Paul as a "crafty" fellow who manipulates by selling God's Word).

47. Garland (1999: 40–44) notes, e.g., the subject of boasting (1:12, 14; 5:12; 10:8, 13, 15–16, 17–18; 11:10, 12, 16–18, 30; 12:1, 5–6, 9), sincerity of his conduct (1:17; 2:17; 4:2; 6:3–10; 7:2; 10:2; 12:16–18), not "according to the flesh" (1:17; 4:2; 5:16; 10:2–4; 12:16); etc.

the Corinthians. In the second movement, chapters 8–9, the apostle specifically challenges the church to get busy with the collection for the saints and to do so now in preparation for his coming visit. Chapters 10–13, moreover, prepare for that visit by taking on the opponents quite directly.

From another perspective, Thomas Schmeller has analyzed the "closeness" of Paul to the Corinthians in chapters 1–9 over against the "distance" in chapters 10–13 in terms of both relationship and situation. Schmeller, following Vegge (2008: 254–359), suggests that both the positive statements in 1–9 and the harsh, critical statements in 10–13 are overstated for rhetorical effect; they thus have a pragmatic function. Vegge suggests that both the statements of "closeness" and "distance" are meant to motivate the Corinthians from the two vantage points. But Schmeller (2013: 81), in contradistinction from Vegge, proposes, "The transition to a more critical tone does not necessarily point to the beginning of a new letter but has more to do with Paul's attempt to deal with the same situation, albeit in two different ways, in order to fulfill two related and yet distinct aims." The situation to which Schmeller refers has to do with the collection for Jerusalem. He suggests that chapters 1–9 prepare for Titus's visit, but 10–13 prepare for Paul's own visit to Corinth. Titus's earlier visit had been successful, while Paul's earlier visit had been a disaster. Also, in chapters 1–9 Paul sets the tone for an appropriate communion between the church in Corinth and the church in Jerusalem. In chapters 10–13, according to Schmeller, the apostle confronts opponents who would challenge his mediation between these two churches. Thus, rather than signaling two letters, the change in tone at 10:1 points to a shift in ways that Paul addresses the situation in Corinth. In 1–9 he prepares for the coming of Titus, while in 10–13 he prepares for his own coming and a final reconciliation (Schmeller 2013: 81).

One final point can be noted in defense of the letter's unity: the last section (chaps. 10–13) closes with a passage that mirrors no fewer than nine terms and phrases found in 1:1–7, forming a striking inclusio (on its use, see Guthrie 1994: 76–89) that brackets the beginning and ending of the letter. The parallel terms (or cognates) are as follows:

Parallel Term	1:1–7	13:11–13
ἀδελφός (*adelphos*, brother)	1:1	13:11
παρακαλέω (*parakaleō*, I comfort)	1:4, 6	13:11
αὐτός (*autos*, same)	1:4, 6	13:11
εἰρήνη (*eirēnē*, peace)	1:2	13:11
θεός (*theos*, God)	1:1, 2	13:11
forms of ὑμεῖς (*hymeis*, you [pl.])	1:2, 6, 7	13:11, 12, 13
οἱ ἅγιοι πάντες (*hoi hagioi pantes*, all the holy people)	1:1	13:12
χάρις (*charis*, grace)	1:2	13:13
κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (*kyriou Iēsou Christou*, the Lord Jesus Christ)	1:2, 3	13:13

This use of inclusio seems to thwart those who propose that these closing verses, in their original literary context, function only as the conclusion to

chapters 10–13. Further, the suggestion that 13:11–13 did not originally belong to 13:1–10 (on which see Thrall 2000: 900) seems highly doubtful given the lexical cohesion between the two units.[48]

For any competent resolution, the details of the discourse and the case for continuity or discontinuity must be made in the process of exegesis and discourse analysis. The approach taken in this commentary assumes the unity of the book, believing that the discourse, while containing great difficulties for interpretation, throughout sustains certain topics such as Paul's treatment of "commendation" and "boasting." There also is great benefit in assessing Paul's posture toward God, toward the Corinthians, and toward the opponents in evaluating the unity, progression, and logic of the book. This will be treated further in the section below (see "The Message and Intent of 2 Corinthians").

The "Voice(s)" with Which Paul Writes 2 Corinthians

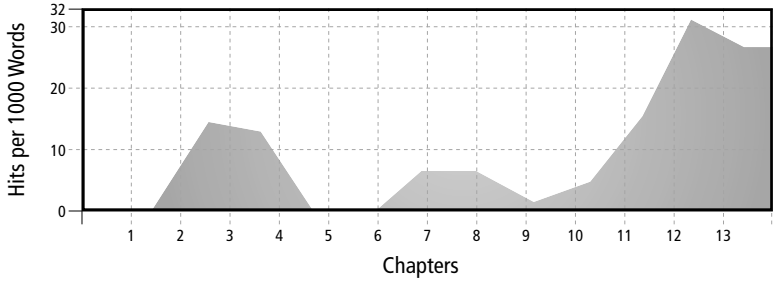
The interplay of first-person singular verbs and pronouns and first-person plural verbs and pronouns in 2 Corinthians raises the question With whose "voice" does Paul speak? When speaking in a "plural voice," does the apostle use a "literary" (or "epistolary") plural, by which "we" represents singular "I"? Or does he speak to the Corinthians both personally (i.e., "I") and as part of a larger ministry team (i.e., "we")?[49]

The convention of the literary plural in Greek writings was on the rise in the Hellenistic period (e.g., in Cicero and Josephus; see Lyons 1985: 42–53), and Paul seems to use it at points (Rom. 2:2; 3:19; 7:14; 8:22, 28; see Thrall 1994: 105). However, the question for 2 Corinthians remains whether Paul in his use of plural forms normally intends to speak of himself as a representative of a larger ministerial group, or whether he uses the first-person plural as a literary device by which he simply means "I." The fact that the apostle names a cosender (1:1) doesn't help us much in and of itself since he also names cosenders in 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, and Philemon, but then proceeds to speak in the first-person singular. It may be noteworthy

48. Elements include forms of λοιπός (13:2, 11), χαίρω (13:9, 11), αὐτός (13:4, 11), θεός (13:4, 7, 11, 13), ὑμεῖς (throughout), πᾶς (13:1, 2, 12, 13), κύριος (13:10, 13), and Ἰησοῦς Χριστός (13:5, 13).

49. E.g., in the benediction of 1:3–7, there is some question about to whom the first-person plural pronoun refers. This use of the plural is sustained all the way through 1:14 and then reactivated at various points in following chapters. Is this a reference to the general Christian community (i.e., "who encourages us as believers in every affliction"), specifically to Paul's ministry team (i.e., "who encourages me and my coworkers in every affliction"), or only to Paul himself—and thus an epistolary, or literary, use of the plural (i.e., "who encourages me in every distressing situation")? The question has no easy resolution. In 1:3–7 plural forms of ἐγώ are used eight times, and in verses 6–7 Paul uses the pronoun or the first-person plural form of the verbs to place the "we" over against "you" references to the Corinthians. Therefore it seems that Paul's use of "we" does not include the Corinthians at this point but accomplishes one of two things. Either he is referring to himself with an epistolary use of the plural, or he is referring to himself and others who are part of his ministerial circle, most immediately Timothy, Silvanus, and Titus.

Figure 1 **Occurrences of the Singular Pronoun ἐγώ in 2 Corinthians**



that 1 and 2 Thessalonians, books that include both Timothy and Silvanus as coauthors (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; cf. 2 Cor. 1:19), are oriented to the use of first-person plural. But what is striking about the authorial voice in 2 Corinthians is the alternation back and forth between singular and plural. Lyons (1985: 14) notes, "The uneven distribution of the first person singular and plural in Paul's letters and the frequent and often inexplicable alternation between the two make it extremely improbable that the fact of co-senders significantly influences his use of 'we.'"[50] How, then, might we understand the apostle's interesting mix of singular and plural? Does the phenomenon have anything to tell us about Paul's approach to ministry as reflected in this book? The issue is notoriously difficult, but I offer the following points for consideration:

1. Notice that although both singular and plural pronouns and verb forms are found throughout the book, chapters 1–9 clearly favor the plural, while chapters 10–13 have a preponderance of the singular.[51] For instance, Paul uses singular forms of the pronoun ἐγώ (*egō*, I/me) 64 times in 2 Corinthians,[52] with a higher concentration of these occurring in the final four chapters of the book (1:17, 19, 23; 2:2–3, 5, 10, 12–13; 6:16–18; 7:4, 7; 9:1, 4; 10:1; 11:1, 9–10, 16, 18, 21–23, 28–30, 32; 12:6–9, 11, 13, 15–16, 20–21; 13:3, 10), as seen in figure 1.[53]

By contrast, ἐγώ occurs in plural forms 108 times in 2 Corinthians, with only 14 of these found in chapters 10–13[54] (1:2–8, 10–12, 14, 18–22; 2:14;

50. The uneven distribution also speaks against dividing the letter neatly into "we" and "I" sections, such as with Murphy-O'Connor (2010: 6), who identifies "broad patterns" and their exceptions. Further, this movement back and forth between singular and plural is unique to the Corinthian correspondence and Colossians (Verhoef 1996: 422).

51. This is one reason some suggest that chaps. 1–9 and 10–13 are two separate letters (e.g., Furnish 1984: 32). Murphy-O'Connor (2010: 11–12) understands the "we" sections to indicate that Paul's letter found in 2 Cor. 1–9 is coauthored with Timothy. The uses of the singular "I" are read as eruptions into an otherwise consistent pattern of speaking of the coauthors in the plural.

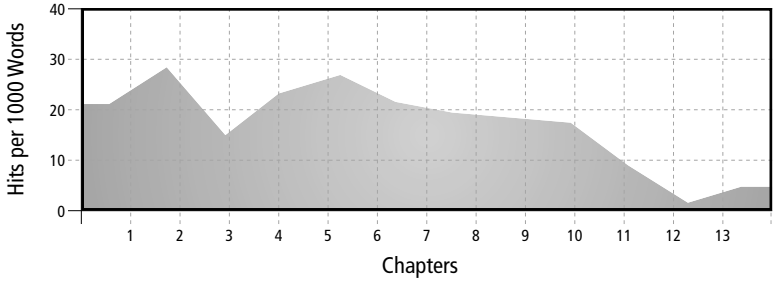
52. In four of these, God is the speaker (6:16–18; 12:9).

53. Notice, e.g., the consistency with which Paul speaks in first-person singular in the "Fool's Speech" of 11:22–12:10.

54. Of these, only two occurrences are in chap. 11 and none in chap. 12.

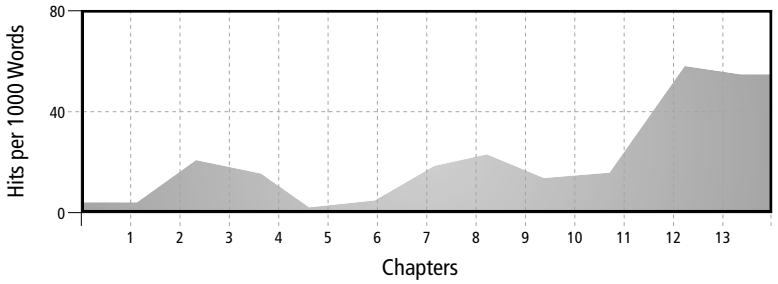
3:2–3, 5–6, 18; 4:3, 6–7, 10–14; 4:16–5:2; 5:5, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18–21; 6:11–12, 16; 7:2–7, 9, 12–14; 8:4–7, 9, 19–20, 22–24; 9:3–4, 11; 10:2, 4, 7–8, 13, 15; 11:12, 21; 13:4, 6–7, 9).

Figure 2 **Occurrences of ἐγώ in Plural Constructions in 2 Corinthians**



We find similar patterns when we consider verbal forms. Verbs in the indicative or subjunctive moods occur in first-person singular forms 145 times in the book, with only a little over one-third of these found in the first nine chapters (1:13, 15, 17, 23; 2:1–5, 8–10, 13; 4:13; 5:11; 6:2, 13, 16–18; 7:3–4, 8–9, 12, 14, 16; 8:3, 8, 10; 9:2–5; 10:1–2, 8–9; 11:2–3, 5, 7–9, 11–12, 16–18, 21, 23–25, 29–31; 11:33–12:3; 12:5–11, 13–18; 12:20–13:2; 13:6, 10).

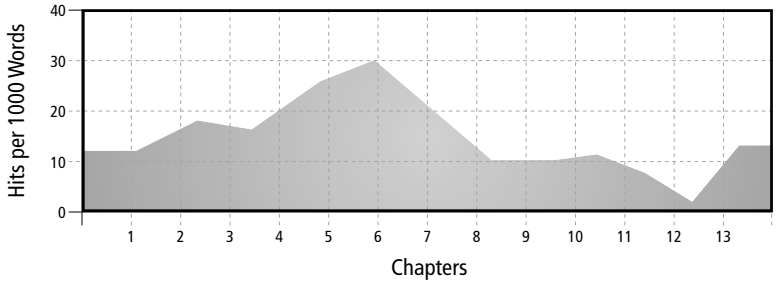
Figure 3 **Occurrences of Singular Indicative and Subjunctive Verbs in 2 Corinthians**



By contrast, first-person plural forms of indicative or subjunctive verbs appear 94 times in the letter, only 21 of these occurring in chapters 10–13 (1:4, 6, 8–10, 12–14, 24; 2:11, 15; 2:17–3:1; 3:4–5, 12; 3:18–4:2; 4:5, 7, 11, 13, 16; 5:1–4, 6–9, 11–13, 16; 5:20–6:1; 6:9, 16; 7:1–2, 13–14; 8:1, 5, 18, 21–22; 9:4; 10:3, 11–14; 11:4, 21; 12:18–19; 13:4, 6–9).

Thus we have a clear *general* pattern in the book that must be taken into consideration. If we reckon all thirteen chapters to form a single letter, why does the apostle transition at 10:1 to speak predominantly in a "singular" voice? It is striking that he begins the section with "Now I, Paul, personally appeal to you," and such a personal appeal fits the preponderance of the

Figure 4 **Occurrences of Plural Indicative and Subjunctive Verbs in 2 Corinthians**



first-person forms in these last chapters of the book. Might it be that the use of the first-person forms in the first nine chapters also marks especially "personal" statements in some way?

2. At times Paul clearly uses the plural to refer to himself and his ministry team. This seems to be the case especially when he speaks of ministry in general, either principles that govern his mission, or patterns of ministry practice. The most obvious case is found in 1:18–19, where the apostle shifts from the singular to the plural to include Timothy and Silvanus as coproclaimers of God's word: "On the contrary, as God is faithful, *our* word to you is not a contradictory 'yes' and 'no'! For Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is among you through *our* preaching, that is through me and Silvanus and Timothy, was not a confusing 'Yes and No,' but in Him has become a resounding 'Yes!'" Here Paul clearly uses the plural pronoun to speak not only of himself but also of a broader team of ministers. Also, notice that when at 1:24 he states, "Not that we dominate you with regard to your faith, but we work together for your joy; for you stand in faith," the Greek noun συνεργοί (*synergoi*, workers) is plural. Paul shifts from first-person singular in 1:23 and then back to first-person singular in 2:1, and he does so, not to employ a literary plural but to make a reference to his broader ministry team. Further, at 3:2 the apostle depicts the Corinthians as a recommendation letter "written on our hearts" (ἐγγεγραμμένη ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν, *engegrammenē en tais kardiais hēmōn*), and the word rendered "hearts" (ταῖς καρδίαις) is plural. Similarly, at 3:6, speaking of himself and his ministry team, Paul writes, "who also made us competent as ministers of a new covenant," and the word rendered "ministers," διακόνους (*diakonous*), is plural in form. These seem to be clear cases where Paul has his broader ministry team in mind.

3. At times the first-person plural is used of all believers or for Paul, his ministry team, and the Corinthians inclusively. For instance, the apostle's mention of the anointing and sealing of the Spirit at 1:21–22 can be understood as referring to all believers. The πάντες (*pantes*, all) at 3:18 clearly indicates that the pronoun ἡμεῖς (*hēmeis*) that precedes it is an inclusive "we," speaking of all those who participate in the liberating new covenant. Further, 5:10 clearly speaks of a mandatory appearance at Christ's judgment seat for all people

(Garland 1999: 74), and Paul seems to refer to all believers when at 6:16 he notes that "we are the temple of the living God" (ἡμεῖς γὰρ ναὸς θεοῦ ἐσμεν ζῶντος, *hēmeis gar naos theou esmen zōntos*). Finally, at 7:1 he seems to make an appeal that encompasses his ministry team and the Corinthians when he writes, "Therefore, dear ones, since *we* have promises like these, *we* should wash ourselves clean from every impurity of the flesh and spirit, making *our* holiness complete in the fear of God."

4. Cranfield (1982: 286) considered it a virtual certainty that Paul at times used the literary plural, a conclusion with which Lyons (1985: 15) agrees: "That 'we,' at least sometimes, means only 'I' cannot be avoided." Accordingly, at least some of the occurrences of the first-person plural in 2 Corinthians seem to be epistolary or literary plurals. For example, Thrall (1994: 106) suggests that the ἡμᾶς (*hēmas*) at 10:2, given the presence of the singular verbs in 10:1–2, almost certainly is epistolary, and this may well be the case. But it should be noted that this use of ἡμᾶς initiates uses of the plural that continue through verse 7, and it is at least possible that the switch to the plural with the pronoun in verse 2 has been effected because the apostle now speaks of patterns of ministry evident in his ministry team. On the other hand, in 10:10 Paul seems to speak of statements made about him personally, and the follow-up use of the plurals in 10:11 ("we say"/"we do") seem to be examples of literary plurals. Other examples of literary plurals have been suggested, for instance, at 2:14–16 (Hafemann 1990b: 12–15); 7:12–14; and 11:6 (Thrall 1994: 106–7). In most cases, however, these *could* be read as references to both Paul and his broader ministry team.

5. There are spans of discourse in 2 Corinthians where the singular and plural forms are used quite consistently, and these may offer further clues for our query. At 2:14–6:15 we find no occurrences of the first-person singular pronoun and only four uses of first-person singular verbs in the indicative or subjunctive moods.[55] Of those four occurrences, two are in quotations (4:13; 6:2) and two are personal interjections by which Paul expresses hope or intense emotion (5:11; 6:13). This consistent use of the plural (with the exception of the interjection at 1:13) is also true of 1:1–14.[56] So the letter

55. In reality the pattern holds all the way through 7:2. The occurrences of the singular pronoun and singular forms of the verbs in the quotation of 6:16–18 have God speaking. Only at 7:3–4, in the apostle's final appeal of the section, does he revert to the singular.

56. I respectfully disagree with Harris (2005: 140–41) on a number of counts. It does not seem obvious that Paul shares a general principle in 1:4 applicable "primarily to himself" (this could include his ministry team). Further against Harris, I think it entirely conceivable that the intense experiences described in 1:8–11 could have been an experience shared by Paul and his coworkers. Moreover, 2:12–13 and 7:5–6 do not refer to "the same events," but rather to a sequence of events, the first focused on leaving Troas and the second on entering Macedonia. In my opinion, it does not seem to be a given that both must be referring to Paul alone. In 2:12–13 Paul may use the singular because he is in the process of defending the decisions he has made in recent months. At 7:5–6 the plural pronoun might indicate that Paul has met and traveled with companions as he moved into Macedonia. It seems that at least Timothy and Erastus were waiting for him there (Acts 19:22); others from Derbe and Asia are named as traveling with him

opening (1:1–2), the prologue (1:3–11), what many consider the letter's thesis statement (1:12–14), and the letter's theological heart (2:14–7:4)—all these are dominated by Paul's "plural voice."

By contrast, the use of plural referents almost completely falls away in the heart (and heat!) of chapters 10–13. It should be remembered, as noted above, that Paul introduces chapters 10–13 as a *personal* appeal (10:1), marking a clear shift in the discourse. It may be suggested that the dominance of the first-person singular in 10–13 is consonant with this section being a personal appeal in which Paul speaks primarily for himself. Between 10:15 and 13:4, plural forms of ἐγώ only occur at 11:12, 21, and first-person plural forms of the verb in the indicative or subjunctive moods appear only at 11:4, 21 and 12:18–19.[57]

6. So how might we read this data? It seems, first of all, that the alternation between singular and plural in the book must be more than an offering of literary variety. This is clearly the case with points 2 and 3 above. Second, it may be suggested that the plural by which Paul refers to both himself and his ministry team can be considered the default voice in the book. The naming of Timothy as cosender, while of little significance on its own, must be read alongside the naming of Timothy and Silvanus as fellow preachers to the Corinthians at 1:18–22 and subtle references to a plurality of ministers at 1:24; 3:2; and 3:6. Accordingly, it seems significant that 1:1–14 and 2:14–6:15, where the apostle offers respectively the introduction and heart of his letter, he lays before the Corinthians praise to God for deliverance in the midst of ministry, as well as the principles and patterns of ministry as lived out by his ministry team.

On the other hand, the middle section of the apostle's confrontational discourse in 2 Cor. 10–13 finds Paul mounting a personal defense of his ministry in which he personally goes toe-to-toe with his opponents in Corinth, defending his own actions. Correspondingly, shifts to the first person throughout the book seem to be triggered by

a. interjection of personal exclamations (e.g., 1:13; 5:11; 6:13),
b. defense of personal decisions or actions (e.g., 1:15–17; 1:23–2:4; much of chaps. 10–13),
c. statements of his own interaction with the Corinthians (e.g., 2:5–11; 6:13; 7:3–4, 8–12; 8:8), and
d. forms of personal history or testimony (e.g., 2:12–13; 8:3).

as he left Corinth, journeying back through Macedonia (Acts 20:4–5), and perhaps they have been with him from the beginning of the trip, though this is by no means clear. In any case, at 7:2–16 the use of the plural pronoun is mixed with the use of first-person singular forms. This might be the epistolary plural at work, with Paul referring to himself alone, but the back-and-forth nature of Paul's use of the singular and plural in the chapter could also be a mix of the apostle referring to himself and to his ministry team.

57. At 11:4 Paul may revert to the plural due to the topic of proclamation, harking back to earlier references to the preaching of his team (e.g., 1:19; 2:17). At 12:18–19 the apostle uses the plural to speak of himself and Titus as a ministry team.

In other words, when Paul turns to his own defense or notes his personal thoughts or actions, he departs from a default orientation in which he, as a general pattern, writes as a part of his broader ministry team.

These patterns are not rigorously followed by the apostle. At times the movement between plural references that include himself and his team members and those that speak of himself in the singular seems fluid. But the shift to first person, rather than a specific literary strategy, highlights the very personal nature of Paul's appeal in this letter. This personal orientation grows in the final four chapters of the book because Paul confronts the unrepentant with his imminent return. In other words, when the apostle's personal relationship or interaction with those in Corinth is foregrounded, and especially when it is more confrontational, he seems to revert to the singular. Elsewhere, it seems he speaks with a plural voice primarily as a way of including his ministry team in his statements.

The apostle Paul understands himself to be unique, and he speaks at times of his own responsibility, or accusations made against him personally, or actions he has personally carried out. Yet ministry to Paul is carried out as part of a larger team, as his mission practices strongly indicate. The "we" of ministry carried out as a team must be considered a significant "voice" in 2 Corinthians alongside the "I" of Paul's personal plans, experiences, perspectives, authority, and defense. The lines between the singular voice and the plural voice are neither rigidly firm, nor are they nonexistent. Paul's concept of ministry posture and practice presents a mixture of his unique role and responsibility as apostle and spiritual father to the Corinthians and his partnership as part of his mission team. This, I suggest, is why 2 Corinthians is written with a mix of singular and plural voices.

2 Corinthians as Reflecting a Relational Network

For those who understand the letter as a patchwork of fragments written at various times and for various purposes, there exists no single purpose and perhaps no unifying message(s) in our canonical 2 Corinthians. But since we consider the book a unity, we need to assess the discourse as a whole, seeking to make sense of the apostle's approach, his message(s), and his intent. A number of analyses of the discourse or its parts are on offer, including a study of the rhetorical form,[58] the literary structure,[59] and its thematic development,[60] and these all prove helpful in various ways. But I wish to offer a slightly different perspective, one that is complementary to other analyses and especially oriented to analyzing the network of relationships reflected in 2 Corinthians. For whatever else we may say about the letter, it may be suggested that the

58. As, e.g., by Witherington 1995: 333–36; Long 2004; Young and Ford 1987: 28, 37–38, 43–44; Danker 1991; Hall 2003: 89–91. See the comments by Harris 2005: 105–10.

59. Especially in analyzing the letter or part of it in terms of its chiastic structure (e.g., Segalla 1988; Blomberg 1989; Garland 1999: 422–23).

60. See, e.g., Hafemann 2000: 37–39; Furnish 1984: xi–xii; Matera 2003: 8–9; Barrett 1973: 51–52.

relational tension between Paul and the Corinthian church (and the Corinthian interlopers) does much to shape this letter. Whether he is appealing for sensitivity to his suffering (e.g., 1:8–11), explaining his decisions (1:12–2:4), commending to the Corinthians his mission's authentic embodiment of Christian ministry (2:14–7:4), promoting the collection (chaps. 8–9), or confronting the Corinthians about his opponents (chaps. 10–13), the apostle addresses various aspects of his relationship with the church and their relationship to his mission. Therefore, one approach to grasping the book's reason for being is to analyze the relational network reflected in its pages.

1. *Paul and his God*. Our letter to the Corinthians manifests a profound "Godward" grounding in the apostle's life and ministry. Paul begins with a self-identification that he is an apostle "by God's will," who writes to "God's church," expressing grace and peace "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1–2). In the face of the afflictions Paul has faced, it is God whom the apostle blesses as the God of supreme encouragement (1:3–7; 7:6), and it is God who delivers, who gives perspective in the face of severe suffering, and on whom Paul has set his hope for the future (1:8–11). Paul and his ministry team conduct their ministry by God's grace and with God-given straightforwardness and sincerity (1:12), as well as by God's anointing and strength (1:21).

Paul preaches the gospel of God's Son, Jesus Christ, in whom all God's promises are fulfilled (1:19–20). God leads his ministers in triumphal procession of this gospel in Christ, and as these ministers proclaim the gospel in the world, they "are a fragrance of Christ to God," for which Paul gives thanks (2:14–16). The apostle speaks, not "twisting" God's Word as a huckster (2:17; 4:2), but as having been "sent by God, living before God, in Christ" (2:17). Since he lives with a posture "before God" (2:17; 4:2) and speaks "in the sight of God" (12:19), he can appeal to God as his witness (1:23), as well as commend himself to people (4:2). He has supreme confidence "through Christ toward God" (3:4), not on the basis of his own abilities, but on the basis of new-covenant, Spirit-enabled competence that comes from God (3:4–6). Paul and his team preach the gospel of God in the world, for they have seen and been transformed by the glory of God in the face of Christ (3:17–18; 4:6).

As God's ministers who preach God's message, Paul and his team suffer, in part so that it might be manifested that the power displayed in their ministry has its source in God (4:7–11). Thus he only boasts in God (10:17–18) and only about his weaknesses (11:21–12:10). In fact, suffering for the sake of God's gospel is building up a tonnage of glory in the unseen, eternal realm (4:16–18); indeed, God prepares his servants for that realm by making for them a "building from God," an eternal, heavenly residence (5:1). Paul lives with a longing to please and be with the Lord (5:8–9), with an appropriate "fear" before God and openness toward God (5:11). In fact, even when he is misunderstood as being out of his mind, Paul lives for God (5:13), constrained by the love of Christ (5:14). God has reconciled Paul and his ministry team to Christ and given them the ministry of calling others to be reconciled to God. Thus they serve as Christ's ambassadors (5:18–21) and commend themselves in every

way as God's ministers in the world (6:3–10). God's grace flows through them (8:1; 9:8, 14), and the result is great thanksgiving and glory to God (9:11–13).

To this end, Paul has been given authority from God to minister to and build up the Corinthian church (10:8, 13; 13:10). Correspondingly, this means that with the very power of God he confronts those who threaten the Corinthian church through false ministry (10:3–6). In fact, Paul preaches God's gospel free of charge to make a clear distinction between himself and the false ministers (11:7–12). Ultimately he prays to God that the Corinthians will be restored and unified in the true gospel so that the God of love and peace will be with them (13:7, 11, 13). In short, Paul's profound Godwardness stems from God being the source, the primary audience, and the ultimate goal for all the apostle is and does. Before God, he lives out and preaches the gospel from God, ministering and suffering for God, to bring about reconciliation between people and God, all to God's glory.

2. *Paul's commitment to and concern for the Corinthians*. This is why Paul ministers to the Corinthians. He has been given the ministry to them by God himself, who assigned Corinth as an area of influence for which Paul was responsible (10:13–14), to the end that he would use this authority to build up the Corinthians in the faith (10:8; 12:19; 13:10). *Thus, in every way the ministry he does is "for" the believers in Corinth* (4:14; 5:13), "in order that when the grace has spread dynamically through many people, it might cause thanksgiving to overflow to God's glory" (4:15). If he and his ministry team suffer affliction, it is for their "encouragement and salvation" (1:6–7); death works in Paul, but life in the Corinthians (4:12). Further, the apostle and his coworkers have lived out a particular pattern of life and ministry toward the Corinthians, and Paul longs for the Corinthians to understand and to be proud of him and his mission (1:12, 14). Paul and his fellow workers do not dominate the faith of the Corinthians but work for their joy (1:24), for Paul loves the Corinthians (11:11) and wants them to know it (2:4). Indeed, rather than acting as dominating "lords," he and his fellow ministers are the Corinthians' "slaves" for the sake of Jesus (4:5). Moreover, the forgiveness he has offered to the offender mentioned in 2:5–11 has been offered for the sake of the Corinthians, so that the community of faith might not be exploited by Satan (2:10–11). This posture toward the Corinthians stems in part from parental concern, for Paul sees the Corinthians as his spiritual children (6:13; 12:14). This is why his heart has been opened wide to them (6:11); thus they are in the "hearts" of Paul and his fellow ministers, "to the point of dying together or living together" (7:3).

At the same time, *the apostle has specific concerns about the Corinthians*; all is not completely well in the church. This is why the apostle is "jealous" about them "with a jealousy from God" (11:2). Their recent actions suggest that at least some of the Corinthians don't fully understand Paul and his team (1:13–14; 5:11). Their misunderstanding of the apostle may also have been contributing to the tentative nature of their obedience, for Paul has felt the need to "test" them to see the extent of their obedience (2:9) and the genuineness

of their love (8:8; 12:15). He wanted them to be clear about their devotion to him (7:12), and at least part of the community responded well to at least one of his tests of devotion, communicated through his grievous letter (7:11). Yet this does not negate the fact that in their relationship with Paul, they have been keeping their hearts closed, held back in their affections, and thus not living in a healthy, open relationship with him and his mission (6:11–13). Their lack of resolute commitment to the apostle and his mission may also be why they have faltered in following through on the collection for Jerusalem (8:10–11).

This coolness of affections toward the apostle has been due in part to their participation in relationships with unbelievers (6:14), which has led to moral impurity (7:1). In fact, Paul is concerned that some among their number will not have repented of their sexual immorality by the time he arrives and that he will find "dissension, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, slanderous words, gossiping, swelled heads, and chaos," which would shame Paul and grieve him deeply (12:20–21). Furthermore, the apostle has great concerns that the false teachers are deceiving them, leading them away from right thinking and pure devotion to Christ (1:3). At least some of the Corinthians are giving too much of a place to the interlopers and their teachings (11:4). It cannot be assumed that all of those in the church at Corinth are in the faith (13:5). Consequently, he prays for their full restoration (13:9).

3. *Paul and his opponents at Corinth*. In a real sense, the false teachers at Corinth are not a part of his "relational network," but they do hover menacingly in the background of this letter. The nature and the extent of opposition to Paul at Corinth has long been a complicated debate. Various views include that the opponents were Judaizers, gnostics, Divine Men, Pneumatics, Jewish-Christian Sophists, or some combination of the above.[61] It seems that questions about the apostle and his mission were being raised by a vocal minority (cf. 2:6) within the church at Corinth, persons who may have been made up of several factions, as well as by interlopers who had presented themselves as alternate "apostles." It is hard to distinguish the concerns of each group, for they probably formed a coalition against Paul, playing off one another (Scott 1998: 11). It is not surprising that in a church made up of house churches spread across a geographical area (1:1), response to Paul was mixed.

Let's first consider concerns about Paul that seem to be reflected in 2 Corinthians[62] and the counterconcerns raised by Paul himself. It seems that

61. For an extensive bibliography on the debate, see Bieringer, Nathan, and Kurek-Chomycz 2008: 209–14. For introductions, see Barnett, *DPL* 644–53; Harris 2005: 67–87; Martin 1986: 336–42; and esp. Sumney 1990: 77–86, who vies for a minimalist approach to historical reconstruction.

62. John Barclay (1987: 74) has suggested that "mirror reading" is both essential and extremely problematic: such a reading, trying to piece together a specific concern or heresy from what is said in a letter, can lead to exegetical romance rather than an accurate assessment of the text. Garland (2003: 13) offers this appropriate caution on mirror reading:

> Since Paul reacts to what the Corinthians are saying, it seems imperative to try to reconstruct what they were thinking so as to understand better his responses. The method used, mirror-reading—reading what Paul says as in some measure mirroring what the Corinthians have said—is fraught with the danger of making mistakes, as the reasoning

opposition to Paul focused on the validity of his apostleship and the conduct of his ministry, and Paul has similar concerns that he expresses about his opponents. In fact, four general areas of criticism provide a framework for the opposition raised against the apostle and the counterconcerns reflected by Paul in 2 Corinthians. These are (a) what constitutes appropriate validation of an apostle, (b) the manifestations of true apostolic ministry, (c) remuneration for ministry, and (d) ministerial integrity.

3a. *Validation of ministry.* First, it seems that Paul's opponents suggested that he lacked the credentials of a valid minister or apostle (3:1–3; 12:12). At 3:1–2 the apostle writes, "We are starting to recommend ourselves to you again. Or do we, like some, need letters of recommendation to you or from you?! You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone." As explained in the commentary, 3:1a can be read as an affirmation of self-recommendation, as the apostle subtly rebukes the Corinthians because he needs to go through a process that should be unnecessary at this point in their relationship. The contrast here (ἤ, *ē*, or) is with the need to produce letters of recommendation, as had supposedly been produced by the opponents, alluded to as "hucksters" in 2:17, when they arrived in Corinth. The apostle points out that his ministry stands validated by the only letter of recommendation he needs—the Corinthians themselves. The validity of authentic ministry manifests in those to whom ministry is carried out.

The interlopers claimed to be apostles (11:13), servants of Christ (11:23) and of righteousness (11:15). They were either claiming to be or being heralded as "superapostles" (11:5, 12; 12:11) who were on par with or superior to Paul (11:12). They were Hebrews (11:22), probably from Palestine. But they were seeking to validate and evaluate ministry on the basis of comparison and inappropriate boasting (10:12; 11:21b–23a), commending themselves (4:5; 10:12) by touting their own competence (3:4–6), outward appearance (5:12; 10:1), and eloquence of speech (10:10; 11:6). In other words, they sought

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is necessarily circular. . . . When such reading is carried out injudiciously, the text can become the servant of preconceived impressions. The interpreter can read too much into what Paul says, read in his or her own biases, and misread Paul's argumentation in a particular passage. Too often in the interpretation of [1 Corinthians] mirror-reading has been used incautiously and overconfidently. The forces shaping the Corinthians' thoughts and actions have been attributed to a particular theological aberration rooted in Gnosticism, Jewish wisdom theology, or an "over-realized eschatology." One theological misconception, however, is unlikely to explain the sundry problems Paul addresses in the letter. If Paul thought that a misrepresentation of the gospel he first preached to them lay behind their problems, then, Pickett (1997: 44–45) reasonably asks, "Why did he not provide them with a more explicitly theological corrective as he does, for example, in Galatians?" It is far more likely that the influences on them were more amorphous and that their behavior was swayed by culturally ingrained habits from their pagan past and by values instilled by a popularized secular ethics.

Our goal in this section is to attempt to discern dynamics in Corinth that are clearly reflected in the text and to probe possible cultural contexts in which such concerns might have been fostered. However, we also want to live within the limits of our data and not overinterpret based on a particular theory of the opponents.

public validation, with personal honor and glory, on the basis of their own accomplishments—even at times claiming the accomplishments of others (10:13–17; 11:12).

By contrast, Paul commends himself (3:1; 4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 10:18; 12:11), boasting only in the Lord and knowing that ultimately only the Lord's commendation matters (10:17–18). Rather than his own abilities and gifts (3:4–6), the apostle commends himself by a display of the truth (4:2) and the condition of his heart before God (2:17; 3:2–3; 5:12; 6:11; 7:3). He does not proclaim himself but Jesus as Lord (4:4–6), and he considers suffering a key validating mark of authentic ministry (4:7–11; 6:4–10), for suffering manifests the power of God (4:7; 12:9–10; 13:3–4). This brings us to a second area of concern expressed in 2 Corinthians.

3b. *Manifestations of true apostolic ministry*. Paul's opponents seem to suggest that the apostle does not manifest divine power in a way that an apostle should (12:12; 13:3), and perhaps that he does not have appropriate spiritual experiences (12:1). Thus he is considered an impostor (6:8), inferior (11:5; 12:11), unimpressive in terms of public presence (10:1, 10) and ineffective, having failed in his ministerial duties (13:4–6). He has to resort to intimidation through his letters (10:9). Elsewhere, it seems he has been accused of being domineering in posture (1:24; 10:8), of restricting the Corinthians (6:12), of not loving them (11:11), and of taking advantage of them (7:2; 12:1).

But Paul suggests that his opponents are the false apostles, as can be seen clearly from their ministry practices and teaching. They are false teachers who minister on the basis of human standards (5:16; 11:18), distorting God's Word (4:2) and offering thoughts "raised up in opposition to knowledge about God" (10:4–5). Paul is deeply concerned that they are seducing the Corinthians away from pure devotion to Christ, preaching another Jesus, a different spirit, a different gospel (11:3–4). Further, they devour, dominate, capture, and slap the Corinthians in the face (11:20).

Paul, on the other hand, manifests the power of God in suffering and in authentic ministry to the Corinthians and in the world (1:12; 3:2–3; 4:11–18; 10:3–4; 13:4). He serves as an ambassador for Christ, to bring about reconciliation between God and people (5:18–6:2). God leads him through the world in a triumphal procession, celebrating Christ. Paul proclaims the gospel in a way that divides humanity, speaking sincerely, as one who is in Christ, sent from God, and living before God (2:14–17). Thus the gospel and its impact manifests authentic Christian ministry as people are brought into new covenant relationship with God (3:12–18).

3c. *Remuneration for apostolic ministry*. It is clear that one of the chief concerns on the part of Paul's opponents is his refusal to receive pay for the ministry he carries out in Corinth (11:7, 9–11; 12:13). It is likely that Paul's manual labor was seen as inappropriate and shameful for one supposed to be a leader and public figure. Yet Paul insists that this "boast" of his will not be stopped because it is a key mark distinguishing his ministry from the false apostles (11:12). The false teachers, on the other hand, seem to have accepted

patronage in Corinth, for they preach for pay (2:17) and devour the Corinthians in the process (11:20).

3d. *Ministerial integrity.* It seems that in some ways Paul and his mission have been accused of lacking integrity. At 1:12 he insists, "Now we are proud of this and say so with a clean conscience: we have lived a pattern of life in the world and especially toward you, which is characterized by straightforwardness and sincerity that come from God, a pattern not based on human wisdom but lived out by God's grace." Paul may simply be asserting his integrity and that of his ministry team as a foundation for the self-recommendation he offers as the letter develops. Yet, with the explanation of his change of itinerary at 1:15–20, the apostle seems at great pains to defend his actions as above reproach. At verse 17 he writes, "Therefore, certainly you don't think I was being wishy-washy when I planned to do this?" Concerning his travel decisions, he feels the need to make a solemn oath before God, "Now, I call upon God as my witness" (1:23). He insists that he and his fellow ministers have turned their "backs on the shameful things people hide, not living by tricks" like his opponents (4:2). In fact, he considers the opponents to be "false," deceitful workers simply masquerading as apostles of Christ (11:13–14). They are masters of deception (11:3, 15), who will be judged according to their actions. Lacking integrity, they have invaded Paul's ministry territory and claimed responsibility for the fruit there (10:13, 15–16). By contrast, it is Paul and his mission who minister in absolute integrity, appealing to the consciences of people and living openly before God (1:12, 14; 2:17; 4:2; 5:11; 6:3–4; 7:2; 8:20–21; 12:17–18).

Sumney concludes that these contrasting visions of apostolic ministry lie at the heart of problems in Corinth,[63] and Harris (2005: 72–73) agrees with this assessment:

> As we have delineated all these charges and countercharges, it all comes down to this. Paul's opponents regarded themselves as ἀπόστολοι Χριστοῦ [*apostoloi Christou*, apostles of Christ] (11:13) and Paul as a πλάνος [*planos*], an imposter (6:8). Paul viewed himself as an ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ (1:1) and his rivals as ψευδαπόστολοι [*pseudapostoloi*, false apostles] (11:13). The Corinthians were faced with rival apostolates. There can be no doubt that the primary and immediate aim of Paul's rivals was to undermine and destroy his reputation and apostolic authority and thus subvert his gospel. What they taught and did was calculated to bring about Paul's downfall, at least at Corinth, and to establish their own credentials as authentic servants of Christ.

We might further add that the function of chapters 10–13 in our letter is Paul's attempt to attack head-on the influence of the false apostles among a recalcitrant minority in the church and to reestablish a full commitment to his mission in the city.

63. Sumney (1999: 130–31) believes chaps. 1–9 and 10–13 constitute two different letters, but he concludes that, generally speaking, the concerns about the opponents and Paul's answers to them are fairly closely aligned in the two parts of 2 Corinthians.

What then of the more specific orientation of these opponents? Among the positions on offer, it seems that the best case has been made for the opponents as Jewish-Christian ministers working under strong influences of the Sophist tradition.[64] Conflict between philosophers and Sophists dated to several centuries before Paul, the Sophists being renounced by Socrates, for instance, for their rhetorical techniques (Thrall 2000: 679). The Sophists were professional educators and traveling speakers who sought pay for their services. At times they embraced philosophical relativism, placing more emphasis on the glory and profit of winning arguments than on proclaiming truth. By the time of the Second Sophistic, the emphasis was on a Sophist teacher being "a virtuoso rhetor with a big public reputation" (Bowersock 1969: 13–14).

Munck (1959: 152–54) suggested that Sophist influence may have been in play in Corinth, as seen in the Corinthian craving for applause, and his lead has been followed by commentators such as Gordon Fee (1987: 49, 80, 94). Winter (2002) has now demonstrated that there is a great deal of evidence for a vibrant Sophist movement in the first century AD and specifically in Corinth. Philo has a great deal to say about Sophists,[65] as do P.Oxy. 2190 and Dio Chrysostom (Winter 2002: 19–39, 48–54), the latter bearing witness to the Corinthians' enthusiasm for Sophist speakers (Winter 2002: 135) and describing the competitive nature of their oratory: "That was the time, too, when one could hear crowds of wretched Sophists around Poseidon's temple shouting and reviling one another, and their disciples, as they were called, fighting with one another, many writers reading aloud their stupid works, many poets reciting their poems while others applauded them" (*Or.* 8.9).

As reflected in 2 Corinthians, the emphases on public appearance, social status, powerful oratory, words of worldly "wisdom," style over content, pay for speaking, boasting about achievements, public applause,[66] and the competitive nature of the opponents[67]—all these match characteristics of the Sophist movement. Winter (2002: 234–35) suggests that Sophists were already present

64. As suggested by Barrett (1971) and Barnett (*DPL* 649–50; 1997: 35), it may be that these ministers were Judaizers, but it is questionable whether the references to "stone tablets" (3:3), the "letter" that kills (3:6), the old-covenant ministry of death (3:7–8), and the claim to be "ministers of righteousness" (11:15) are sufficient evidence to make that judgment. Paul's evocation of old-covenant imagery in 3:3–18 may simply be the offering of biblical reflection on the nature of new-covenant ministry as an answer to any alternate form of so-called ministry.

65. There are some forty-eight references to Sophists in Philo's works (e.g., *Creat.* 157; *Alleg.* 3.232; *Cher.* 10; *Worse* 35, 38–39, 41–42, 71–72; *Post.* 86, 131, 150; *Jos.* 103, 106; *Mos.* 1.92; 2.212; *Rewards* 58; *Contempl.* 4, 31; *Etern.* 132; *QG* 3.27, 33, 35).

66. Quintilian (*Inst.* 2.2.9–12), a contemporary of Paul, speaks against "mutual and indiscriminate applause" that tends toward the theatrical and is the "worst foe of genuine study" in a school. "But in the schools today we see boys stooping forward ready to spring to their feet: at the close of each period they not merely rise, but rush forward with shouts of unseemly enthusiasm. Such compliments are mutual and the success of a declamation consists in this kind of applause. The result is vanity and empty self-sufficiency" (cf. 2 Cor. 3:4–6 on self-sufficiency).

67. With reference to 1 Corinthians, Thiselton (2000: 15) states, "Thus there grew up a pragmatic concern with who had the best performance, who was winning in the marketplace."

in Corinth when 1 Corinthians was written,[68] and 2 Cor. 10–13 reflects the full blossoming of their impact in the church. His suggestion that Paul's words in the Corinthian correspondence constitute an anti-sophistic stance makes good sense, and Winter's suggestions are bolstered and furthered by Clarke (1993: 129–31), who has demonstrated that the sophistic interlopers fostered in the Corinthian church an intrusion of secular leadership values, which Paul must combat. A sophistic approach to public leadership would have greatly appealed to the Corinthians—indeed they embraced these fools!—but Paul says that this approach to ministry constitutes pure foolishness and must not be tolerated (11:19–20). One wonders if there aren't parallels in the modern church that need similar attention!

The Message and Intent of 2 Corinthians

As described above, Paul's immediate relational network provides one framework for understanding the main message and ultimate intent of 2 Corinthians. In spite of the tensions in their relationship, the majority in the church at Corinth had responded well to the apostle's leadership—at least to a certain extent and in response specifically to the concerns in the painful letter of 2:3–4/7:8 (1:14; 2:6; 7:7). Now he wanted the church to move to complete obedience (10:6) and those who had yet to repent to do so (7:1; 12:20–21). He also wanted the church to follow through on their commitment to the collection for the saints in Jerusalem (chaps. 8–9) and to reject the so-called "ministry" of the interlopers. To these ends, Paul attempted to answer various charges leveled against him and, correspondingly, to commend his ministry to the Corinthians, drawing the church back into a healthy relationship with himself, his mission, and God. The book has been notorious for the circuitous development of its themes, prompting the many theories concerning patched-together fragments. Yet, from certain perspectives, there is a logic to its development.

In the overview that follows, notice two primary dynamics, the "context" and the "core content" of the apostle's communication. First, the theme of "travel" provides one important structural framework for an analysis of the book's discourse. Travel in this sense is the "geographical context" of the conversation—which is not surprising since Paul was traveling when he wrote the book. Paul begins the letter's main body by explaining his travel decisions (1:15–2:11). The apostle brackets the great central section of the letter with the "absence" and then "presence" of Titus in Paul's move to Macedonia (2:12–13; 7:5–7). That central section, the book's theological heart (2:14–7:4), is launched with an image of God as leading the apostle and his fellow ministers in triumphal procession through the world as proclaimers of the gospel (2:14–16). As Paul addresses the Corinthians' commitment to the collection, Titus is again present with them (8:16–24) in preparation for the coming of

68. Thus the apostle's manner when he first came to Corinth presents a firm decision not to follow sophistic patterns (1 Cor. 2:1–5; Winter 2002: 151).

the absent apostle (9:3–5). Finally, chapters 10–13 are also bracketed by the twin themes of Paul's absence and presence (10:1, 11; 13:1–2, 10),[69] for his confrontation of the false teachers constitutes a key point in preparation for his imminent return.

If travel forms the context or framework of his communication, the content has to do largely with the network of Paul's immediate relationships described above, that is, with God, Paul's concern for the Corinthians, the authenticity of Paul's ministry (communicated in part by his suffering as he travels around), and how the Corinthians should respond in this ministry moment. Paul does not have a direct relationship with the interlopers, who are always in the background but do not become the main topic until chapters 10–13. Even then, he does not address them directly but addresses the Corinthians concerning the false teachers. Yet notice that Paul's commendation of his own ministry is woven throughout the book. At every point in this letter, we are presented with the apostle's appropriate boasting in the Lord, which often means his boasting in suffering. Notice also that Paul constantly appeals to the Corinthians, through various means exhorting them to return to a healthy relationship with their apostle. Thus the backbone of the book unfolds as follows:

Absence and Presence in the Structure of 2 Corinthians

Context (Travel)	Content
	The Letter Opening and Prologue (1:1–11)
While Paul was absent	God: Praised for his redemption of suffering Paul: Encouraged and brought to complete dependence on God Corinthians: Treated as part of Paul's ministry
	Why Paul Did Not Come Directly to Corinth (1:12–2:13)
Why Paul was absent; Titus absent	God: Has strengthened and anointed Paul for ministry Paul: Has acted with complete integrity and for the Corinthians Corinthians: Have misunderstood and needed a test
	Paul's Ministry of Integrity (2:14–7:4)
What Paul has been doing while absent	God: Leads Paul's mission through the world, transforming people by the gospel Paul: Proclaims the gospel, commending his ministry in every way, and suffers as Christ's ambassador of reconciliation Corinthians: Should be reconciled to God and reject unhealthy relationships
	When Titus Arrived in Macedonia: The Happy Result When the Corinthians Respond Well (7:5–16)
When Paul found Titus	God: Encouraged Paul and clarified things for the Corinthians Paul: Encouraged and rejoiced at Titus's coming and news Corinthians: Grief led to repentance

69. In fact, inclusios built on the themes of "presence" and "absence" bracket the units at the beginning and end of 2 Cor. 10–13 (excluding the closing in 13:11–13). This should be seen as a significant structural marker.

Context (Travel)	Content
	How to Prepare for Paul's Coming (Part 1): Again Take Up the Ministry of Giving (8:1–9:15)
Titus present to prepare for Paul's coming	God: God's grace manifests in giving Paul: Has sent Titus to prepare this ministry Corinthians: Prepare by reinitiating the collection
	How to Prepare for Paul's Coming (Part 2): Reject the False Teachers, Embrace Paul (10:1–13:13)
Paul absent but will be present soon!	God: Has assigned Paul the ministry in Corinth, bears witness to Paul Paul: Boasts in God, especially in his own weaknesses Corinthians: Should reject the false teachers and test themselves

Following the letter opening, the apostle offers a benediction, praising God for encouragement and for God's work in the midst of suffering (1:3–7). The testimony of 1:8–11 offers a specific example of how God had redeemed suffering in the life of the apostle and his fellow ministers. The weakness of suffering in Asia, where Paul was confronted with his own limitations, manifested God's strength. Thus the prologue (1:3–11), with its emphasis on God's work through affliction, highlights a dominant theme for the book. Yet it also invites the Corinthians into the messy mix of Paul's ministry. Already Paul draws the wayward church close with his words, speaking of them as those who share in his sufferings (1:7) and offer prayer to God on his behalf (1:11). Thus the prologue begins with a positive focus on God, on God's work in and through affliction, and on the Corinthians' need to share in Paul's mission.

Yet this invitation to draw close brings to mind the jarring tension that has invaded the apostle's relationship with this church, and in the next movement the apostle confronts that tension head-on (1:12–2:11). Since concerns have been raised about his change in travel itinerary, Paul defends his recent decisions as being carried out with complete integrity (1:12–2:4). His confident testimony of a clear conscience and his desire to be understood by the Corinthians (1:12–14)—what some consider the book's thesis statement—presents another key theme of the book. The apostle has acted with complete integrity, but because they have not understood him and his mission (1:14), pain has entered his relationship with the church. This painful conflict in his relationship with the Corinthians was manifested in a painful visit (2:1), a decision not to come to Corinth as planned (1:23; 2:1–2), and a painful letter (2:3), evidently having to do with an offender who had caused a great deal of pain to the community (2:5–11).

Second Corinthians 2:12–13 functions to effect a transition, picking up the "travel" explanations of 1:15–2:5, introducing the alternate itinerary the apostle had followed (2:12–13), and anticipating the resolution of Paul's travel narrative at 7:5–7. This transition in 2:12–13 and the resolution in 7:5–7 form a bracket and thus set in great relief the theological heart of the book, which

focuses on the nature of Paul's authentic ministry (2:14–7:4). In this section Paul carries out a form of self-recommendation (3:1; 4:2; 5:12; 6:4), explaining how his mission, as they travel through the world, spreads the aroma of knowledge about God through the gospel (2:14–16). Paul and his fellow workers are distinct from hucksters who preach for profit, because Paul and his team are from God, live before God, and speak with sincerity in Christ (2:17).

Thus the Corinthians themselves are the only recommendation letter Paul needs (3:1–3), for he and his team are true ministers of the new covenant, which transforms people (3:4–4:6). Gospel ministry, moreover, involves sacrifice and suffering. The treasure resides in terra-cotta so that the life of Jesus can be manifested through suffering and God will be glorified (4:7–15). The frailty of the minister's life also turns his or her focus to the eternal, unseen world (4:16–18) and ultimately the resurrection from the dead (5:1–10). Paul lives openly before God and the Corinthians, and he and his fellow workers are driven by the call of God and the gospel (5:11–15). It is on the basis of this ministry of reconciliation, drawing people to right relationship with God through Jesus Christ, that Paul calls the Corinthians to be reconciled to God through being reconciled to his ministry (5:16–6:2). All of Paul's life and ministry—including his sufferings—commends his ministry to the Corinthians (6:3–10), and he pleads with them to open their lives to him (6:11–13). But since they are limited by their own affections, he uses Scripture to exhort them to turn again to the true worship of God and abandon spiritually unhealthy relationships with unbelievers (6:14–7:4).

At 7:5 the apostle resumes his travel narrative. He has allowed the hearers to live with the unresolved tension embodied in 2:12–13 (the absence of Titus), for authentic ministry lives in suffering and tension. But now the tension is resolved for at least two reasons: (1) Paul celebrates that the majority in the community have responded well to his painful letter. Their repentance has paved the way for their reengagement with Paul's mission through the collection. In addition, the God of all encouragement (1:3–7) has encouraged Paul by the Corinthians' response, showing that God is working in their community (7:7, 12, 13–16). (2) Paul has delayed his account of Titus's coming, for it is only now that he is ready to reintroduce their need to engage in the collection for the saints (chaps. 8–9). So he has sent Titus to them again, along with two other brothers (8:17–19, 22), in preparation for Paul's return to Corinth (9:3–5).

But in preparation for Paul's return to the city, there is a final great need. The foolishness surrounding the false apostles has gone on long enough. So Paul, in a personal appeal, confronts the Corinthians' toleration of these interlopers in no uncertain terms. His apostolic power and authority will be manifested when he returns (10:1–10; 13:1–4). He makes his principles about wrongheaded boasting and games of classification and comparison abundantly clear. Paul will not play by the interlopers' rules; instead, he only boasts in the Lord (1:12–18). But then, in a grand parody of the false teachers' foolish boasting, the apostle does speak a bit of foolishness. He "celebrates" the Corinthians' amazing "tolerance" for the interlopers (11:1–4) and boasts

that he has preached to the Corinthians free of charge, for that makes a clear distinction between him and the false apostles (11:5–15). The pinnacle of his "foolishness" is the grand Fool's Speech of 11:22–12:10, in which he turns boasting on its head by boasting about his weaknesses. Why has he been so foolish? The Corinthians, who should have commended him, drove him to it (12:11–13). So in preparation for his coming, they should repent and embrace his ministry, which is for building them up (12:14–13:10). Paul then closes, reiterating themes from the letter opening and prologue, longing for the Corinthians' maturity, unity, and right relationship with God (13:11–13).

In short, the message of 2 Corinthians is that Paul commends his ministry to the Corinthians as one of integrity. Appointed by God, under the lordship of Christ, and suffering in his proclamation of the gospel, Paul calls the Corinthians to repent from unhealthy relationships and embrace his authentic apostolic leadership. Their appropriate response will be seen, on the one hand, by again taking up the collection for Jerusalem, and on the other hand, by resolutely rejecting the ministry of the false teachers.

Outline of the Book

I. The letter opening and prologue (1:1–11)
  A. Letter opening (1:1–2)
  B. Prologue (1:3–11)
    1. Praise God for his encouragement! (1:3–7)
    2. Paul's recent deliverance (1:8–11)
II. The integrity of Paul's ministry (1:12–7:16)
  A. Why Paul did not come directly to Corinth (1:12–2:13)
    1. The integrity of Paul's recent actions (1:12–14)
    2. Misunderstanding Paul's change of travel plans (1:15–22)
    3. Why Paul changed his travel plans, part 1: Confrontation would have been painful for the Corinthians (1:23–2:11)
      a. A painful visit and a painful letter (1:23–2:4)
      b. Forgive the one who caused the pain (2:5–11)
    4. Why Paul changed his travel plans, part 2: An open door and an absent coworker (2:12–13)
  B. Paul's reflections on authentic ministry (2:14–7:4)
    1. Paul commends his authentic ministry (2:14–4:6)
      a. Led in Christ's triumph (2:14–16a)
      b. Qualified for ministry (2:16b–3:6)
      c. The better ministry of the Spirit (3:7–18)
      d. A ministry of integrity (4:1–6)
    2. The suffering involved in Paul's authentic ministry (4:7–5:10)
      a. Treasure and terra-cotta (4:7–15)
      b. Perspective in the midst of suffering (4:16–18)
      c. Longing to be "fully clothed" (5:1–10)

3. "Respond to authentic ministry": A series of exhortations to the Corinthians (5:11–7:4)
   a. An opportunity for the Corinthians (5:11–13)
   b. The ministry of reconciliation (5:14–6:2)
   c. The impeccable apostolic credentials of Paul's mission (6:3–10)
   d. A call for open hearts and pure lives (6:11–7:4)

C. When Titus arrived in Macedonia: The happy result when the Corinthians respond well (7:5–16)

III. The ministry of giving (8:1–9:15)
   A. Paul's exhortation to finish the collection (8:1–15)
   B. Titus's mission (8:16–9:5)
   C. Reflections on resources for giving and the results (9:6–15)

IV. Paul confronts the malignant ministry of his opponents (10:1–13:13)
   A. Present or absent, Paul's authority is the same (10:1–11)
   B. Proper and improper boasting (10:12–18)
   C. Paul boasts like a fool to stop the false apostles (11:1–12:13)
      1. Bear with me, not them (11:1–4)
      2. Paul and the "superapostles" (11:5–15)
      3. Embracing fools (11:16–21)
      4. Paul's countercultural "Fool's Speech," part 1 (11:22–29)
      5. Paul's countercultural "Fool's Speech," part 2 (11:30–12:10)
      6. Epilogue to the "Fool's Speech" (12:11–13)
   D. Preparation for the third visit (12:14–13:10)
      1. Concerns related to the third visit (12:14–21)
      2. The third visit as stern accountability (13:1–10)
   E. Closing exhortations, greetings, and benediction (13:11–13)

I. The Letter Opening and Prologue (1:1–11)

The German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe once wrote, "Letters are among the most significant memorial[s] a person can leave behind them," and the statement certainly rings true in the case of the apostle Paul. The apostle's ministry ranged over a vast geographical area, and long-distance communication played a vital role in his work. No medium for that communication has had a more lasting impact than that of the apostle's letters, and his letters present certain patterns in terms of form.

In the Greco-Roman world, letters often were papyrus scrolls—though brief notes were scribbled on a variety of materials—with an outside address to which the letter was to be sent. The text on the "inside" of the letter often started with a "prescript," or letter opening; just as today we may open a letter with "Dear _____," letters of Paul's day also often followed a standard format of a *superscriptio* (the sender's name in the nominative form), an *adscriptio* (the name of the addressee in the dative), and finally a *salutatio* (a greeting in the infinitive) (Klauck and Bailey 2006: 17–18). The apostle follows this pattern as he opens 2 Corinthians:

superscriptio	Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, and our brother Timothy,
adscriptio	to God's church in Corinth, along with all God's holy people throughout Achaia:
salutatio	Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Notice the rhythmical balance of this brief opening, in which we are presented with four pairs: Paul and Timothy; the church in Corinth and God's holy people throughout Achaia; grace and peace; and finally, God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the first century the letter opening often was followed by a *proem*, or prologue, which served to make a transition to the letter body. Paul's prologue has two movements, a benediction praising God for encouragement (1:3–7), followed by an account of a recent, harrowing brush with death and the celebration of God's deliverance of the apostle and his coworkers (1:8–11). Early in the development of the use of epistolary prologues, we find the *formula valetudinis*, which Seneca the Younger (*Ep.* 15.1) described as "a custom which survived even into my lifetime. They would add to the opening words of a letter, 'If you are well, it is well; I also am well'" (as quoted in Klauck and Bailey 2006: 21). So, fundamental to the prologue was a statement of how things were going in the life of the writer, and this constitutes part of the content of Paul's prologue in 2 Corinthians, since he informs the Achaians about tribulations that have affected his life and ministry.

The prologue also could include expressions of thanksgiving and references to prayer (Klauck and Bailey 2006: 42), both of which are also included in 2 Cor. 1:3–11. Paul expresses thanks in the form of his benediction (1:3–5) and mentions the thanks that will be given as a result of the Corinthians' answered prayers (1:11). It may also be that the element of "remembrance" of someone before the gods lies behind Paul wanting the Corinthians to not "be unaware of," or perhaps "take lightly," the apostle's great affliction experienced in Asia (1:8).