

# Second Corinthians



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For Timothy  
and all those who walked with me on the road to Corinth,  
in gratitude and appreciation



# Contents



	List of Figures	ix
	Foreword	x
	Preface	xii
	Abbreviations	xiv
	Introduction	3
2 Corinthians 1:1–2	The Letter Opening	21
<b>2 Corinthians 1:3–2:13</b>	<b>Part 1: Ministerial Crises</b>	<b>29</b>
2 Corinthians 1:3–11	A Prayer of Praise and the Asian Experience	31
2 Corinthians 1:12–2:4	Paul’s Defense of His Integrity	39
2 Corinthians 2:5–11	A Disciplinary Matter	54
2 Corinthians 2:12–13	Frustration in Troas	61
<b>2 Corinthians 2:14–7:4</b>	<b>Part 2: Paul Explains and Defends His Apostolic Ministry</b>	<b>67</b>
2 Corinthians 2:14–3:6	Anxiety and Confidence	69
2 Corinthians 3:7–4:6	A Glorious Ministry	81
2 Corinthians 4:7–5:10	The Present and the Future	97
2 Corinthians 5:11–6:10	A Ministry of Reconciliation	114
2 Corinthians 6:11–7:4	A Plea for Personal Reconciliation	141

2 Corinthians 7:5–16	<b>Part 3: The Arrival and Report of Titus</b>	155
2 Corinthians 8:1–9:15	<b>Part 4: Service to God’s Holy People</b>	163
2 Corinthians 8:1–24	The Collection	165
2 Corinthians 9:1–15	A Further Appeal	180
2 Corinthians 10:1–13:10	<b>Part 5: An Aggressive Taskmaster</b>	193
2 Corinthians 10:1–18	Paul’s Missionary Task	195
2 Corinthians 11:1–15	On the Attack	210
2 Corinthians 11:16–12:13	Boasting like a Fool	224
2 Corinthians 12:14–13:10	Paul’s Third Visit to Corinth	248
2 Corinthians 13:11–13	The Letter Closing	263
	Bibliography	271
	Index of Subjects	284
	Index of Modern Authors	289
	Index of Scripture and Ancient Sources	290

# Figures



1. Icon of the Apostle Paul 23
2. Map of Corinth 24
3. Paul's Travel Plans according to 1 Cor. 16 44
4. Paul's Actual Travels according to 2 Cor. 1 45
5. Moses with the Stone Tablets 83
6. Clay Jar from Qumran 99
7. The *Bēma* in Corinth 110
8. A Roman Soldier 132
9. Coins of the Realm 169
10. The Lechaion Road 176
11. Spoils from the Jerusalem Temple 218
12. The Corinthian Agora 222
13. Paul Being Let Down in a Basket 235
14. A *Corona Muralis* 236
15. Final Lines of 2 Corinthians from Codex Sinaiticus 266

## Foreword



*Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament* is a series that sets out to comment on the final form of the New Testament text in a way that pays due attention both to the cultural, literary, and theological settings in which the text took form and to the interests of the contemporary readers to whom the commentaries are addressed. This series is aimed squarely at students—including MA students in religious and theological studies programs, seminarians, and upper-division undergraduates—who have theological interests in the biblical text. Thus, the didactic aim of the series is to enable students to understand each book of the New Testament as a literary whole rooted in a particular ancient setting and related to its context within the New Testament.

The name “Paideia” (Greek for “education”) reflects (1) the instructional aim of the series—giving contemporary students a basic grounding in academic New Testament studies by guiding their engagement with New Testament texts; (2) the fact that the New Testament texts as literary unities are shaped by the educational categories and ideas (rhetorical, narratological, etc.) of their ancient writers and readers; and (3) the pedagogical aims of the texts themselves—their central aim being not simply to impart information but to form the theological convictions and moral habits of their readers.

Each commentary deals with the text in terms of larger rhetorical units; these are not verse-by-verse commentaries. This series thus stands within the stream of recent commentaries that attend to the final form of the text. Such reader-centered literary approaches are inherently more accessible to liberal arts students without extensive linguistic and historical-critical preparation than older exegetical approaches, but within the reader-centered world the sanest practitioners have paid careful attention to the extratext of the original readers, including not only these readers’ knowledge of the geography, history, and other contextual elements reflected in the text but also their ability to respond



correctly to the literary and rhetorical conventions used in the text. Paideia commentaries pay deliberate attention to this extratextual repertoire in order to highlight the ways in which the text is designed to persuade and move its readers. Each rhetorical unit is explored from three angles: (1) introductory matters; (2) tracing the train of thought or narrative or rhetorical flow of the argument; and (3) theological issues raised by the text that are of interest to the contemporary Christian. Thus, the primary focus remains on the text and not its historical context or its interpretation in the secondary literature.

Our authors represent a variety of confessional points of view: Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox. What they share, beyond being New Testament scholars of national and international repute, is a commitment to reading the biblical text as theological documents within their ancient contexts. Working within the broad parameters described here, each author brings his or her own considerable exegetical talents and deep theological commitments to the task of laying bare the interpretation of Scripture for the faith and practice of God's people everywhere.

Mikeal C. Parsons  
Charles H. Talbert

# Preface



Just two days ago, I returned to the United States from a visit to Rome, where I participated in the twenty-second biannual meeting of the Ecumenical Pauline Colloquium held in the Benedictine Abbey of St. Paul's Outside the Walls. This year's colloquium was devoted to 2 Thessalonians and Pauline eschatology. Among the passages that we considered in detail was one from 2 Corinthians, insightfully presented by Morna Hooker, emerita of Cambridge, whose paper focused on 2 Cor. 5:1–10.

Inevitably, the identity of Paul's "we" arose in the discussion of the passage. Was Paul speaking about only himself, using some sort of editorial or apostolic "we"? Did he perhaps also have in mind Timothy, the coauthor of this letter, and/or other missionaries? Did he perchance offer a reflection on the possibility of his own death as a paradigm for the Christian believers, who were his addressees, to ponder?

Not only did the twenty-seven of us who participated in the colloquium have the matter of the significance of the "we" of 2 Corinthians to consider; we also weighed the matter of the coauthorship of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, asking ourselves about the extent to which Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2) contributed to these letters and to what extent the letters' characteristic "we" referred not only to Paul but also to Silvanus and Timothy.

Paul wrote his letters neither in a vacuum nor in isolation. His was a "team ministry." His letters, including the Second to the Corinthians, reflect that approach to the proclamation of the gospel. He sent the letter with which this commentary is concerned not only on behalf of himself but also on behalf of Timothy, his brother (2 Cor. 1:1). In this letter he speaks about how he was virtually lost without Titus and how much he relied on Titus in his dealings with the Corinthians, especially with regard to the collection that was to be

made as a service to God's holy people in Jerusalem. Paul needed Timothy and Titus in order to function as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

No more than Paul was able to proclaim the gospel in spoken word and by written letter without the help of others have I been able to write this commentary on his gospel without the help of others. To begin, let me express my gratitude to James Ernest of Baker Academic and Brazos Press, who invited me to write this commentary at a time when I was still teaching at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. His support when the project was delayed due to a host of reasons beyond my control is particularly appreciated.

I must also thank those who helped to bring this study to its completion. The initial comments of Mikael Parsons, one of the general editors of the *Paideia* series, proved to be helpful indeed. Wells Turner, senior editor at Baker Academic and Brazos Press, and his team amazed me with their careful proofreading of the text. Rachel Klompmaker assiduously tracked down material for the illustrations, searching sometimes in vain for an illustration that I would have liked to include. To all of them I express my appreciation.

I am also grateful to colleagues at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium, particularly my dear friend Jan Lambrecht and his successor in Leuven, Reimund Bieringer. The latter, a former student, invited me to participate in the 2 Corinthians project that he cochairs within the Society of Biblical Literature. The contributions of these two scholars to the understanding of 2 Corinthians is well known to biblical exegetes and is reflected in these pages. Nonetheless, I value their friendship and their personal support even more than I value their exegetical contributions.

Finally, I would be remiss were I not to express my gratitude for the help, the support, and the challenges of "Timothy" who shared so much of this project with me and who so reminds me of Paul's own Timothy, if not his Titus.

Raymond F. Collins  
Narragansett, Rhode Island  
September 18, 2012

# Abbreviations



## General

---

BCE	before the Common Era (= BC)	hapax	hapax legomenon, term appearing only once
ca.	<i>circa</i> , approximately		
CE	the Common Era (= AD)	lit.	literally
cent.	century	mg.	marginal reading
chap(s).	chapter(s)	NT	New Testament
col(s).	column(s)	<i>olim</i>	formerly
frg(s).	fragment(s)	OT	Old Testament

## Bible Texts, Editions, and Versions

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Eng.	chapter/verse numbering in English versions
JB	Jerusalem Bible
KJV	King James (Authorized) Version
LXX	Septuagint, the Greek Bible
MT	Masoretic Text, the Hebrew Bible
NA <sup>28</sup>	<i>Nestle-Aland: Novum Testamentum Graece</i> . Edited by Eberhard and Edwin Nestle et al. 28th rev. ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012.
NAB	New American Bible
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
REB	Revised English Bible
Theod.	Theodotion
UBS <sup>4</sup>	<i>The Greek New Testament</i> . Edited by Barbara and Kurt Aland et al. 4th rev. ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft / United Bible Societies, 1994.
Vulg.	Latin Vulgate

## Ancient Manuscripts, Papyri, and Inscriptions

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<b>Ⲛ</b>	Codex Sinaiticus
<b>B</b>	Codex Vaticanus
<b>BGU</b>	<i>Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen/Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin: Griechische Urkunden</i> . 15 vols. Berlin, 1895–1983.
<b>C</b>	Codex Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus
<b>I.Priene</b>	<i>Die Inschriften von Priene</i> . Berlin, 1968.
<b>P.Aberd.</b>	<i>Catalogue of Greek and Latin Papyri and Ostraca in the Possession of the University of Aberdeen</i> . Edited by E. G. Turner. Aberdeen, 1939.
<b>P.Alex.</b>	<i>Papyrus grecs du Musée Gréco-Romain d’Alexandrie</i> . Edited by A. Swiderek and M. Vandoni. Warsaw, 1964.
<b>P.BruX.</b>	<i>Papyri Bruxellenses Graecae</i> . 2 vols. Brussels, 1974–91. Plus unpublished papyri at Brussels.
<b>P.Laur.</b>	<i>Dai Papiri della Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana</i> . 5 vols. Florence, 1976–84.
<b>P.Mert.</b>	<i>A Descriptive Catalogue of the Greek Papyri in the Collection of Wilfred Meriton</i> . 3 vols. London, 1948–67.
<b>P.NYU</b>	<i>Greek Papyri in the Collection of New York University</i> . 2 vols. Leiden, 1967; Wiesbaden, 2010.
<b>P.Oslo</b>	<i>Papyri Osloenses</i> . 3 vols. Oslo, 1925–36.
<b>P.Oxy.</b>	<i>The Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i> . 75 vols. 1898–2010.
<b>P.Princ.</b>	<i>Papyri in the Princeton University Collections</i> . 3 vols. 1931–42.
<b>P.Tebt.</b>	<i>The Tebtunis Papyri</i> . 5 vols. 1902–2005.
<b>P.Wisc.</b>	<i>The Wisconsin Papyri</i> . Edited by P. J. Sijpesteijn. 2 vols. Leiden, 1967; Zutphen, 1977.
<b>P.Yale</b>	<i>Yale Papyri in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library</i> . 3 vols. 1967–2001.

## Ancient Corpora

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<b>OLD TESTAMENT</b>		<b>Ps(s).</b>	<b>Psalm(s)</b>
Gen.	Genesis	Prov.	Proverbs
Exod.	Exodus	Eccles.	Ecclesiastes
Lev.	Leviticus	Song	Song of Songs
Num.	Numbers	Isa.	Isaiah
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Jer.	Jeremiah
Josh.	Joshua	Lam.	Lamentations
Judg.	Judges	Ezek.	Ezekiel
Ruth	Ruth	Dan.	Daniel
1–2 Sam.	1–2 Samuel	Hosea	Hosea
1–2 Kings	1–2 Kings	Joel	Joel
1–2 Chron.	1–2 Chronicles	Amos	Amos
Ezra	Ezra	Obad.	Obadiah
Neh.	Nehemiah	Jon.	Jonah
Esther	Esther	Mic.	Micah
Job	Job	Nah.	Nahum

## Abbreviations

Hab.	Habakkuk
Zeph.	Zephaniah
Hag.	Haggai
Zech.	Zechariah
Mal.	Malachi

### DEUTEROCANONICAL BOOKS

Bar.	Baruch
1–2 Esd.	1–2 Esdras
1–4 Macc.	1–4 Maccabees
Sir.	Sirach/Ecclesiasticus
Wis.	Wisdom of Solomon

### NEW TESTAMENT

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

### OLD TESTAMENT PSEUDEPIGRAPHA

<i>Apoc. Ab.</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Abraham</i>
<i>Apoc. Mos.</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Moses (in L.A.E.)</i>
<i>2 Bar.</i>	<i>2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse)</i>
<i>1 En.</i>	<i>1 Enoch (Ethiopic Apocalypse)</i>
<i>2 En.</i>	<i>2 Enoch (Slavonic Apocalypse)</i>
<i>4 Ezra</i>	<i>4 Ezra</i>
<i>Jos. Asen.</i>	<i>Joseph and Aseneth</i>
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>

<i>L.A.B.</i>	<i>Liber antiquitatum biblicarum (Pseudo-Philo)</i>
<i>L.A.E.</i>	<i>Life of Adam and Eve</i>
<i>Let. Aris.</i>	<i>Letter of Aristeas</i>
<i>Liv. Pro.</i>	<i>Lives of the Prophets</i>
<i>Sib. Or.</i>	<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>
<i>T. Ash.</i>	<i>Testament of Asher</i>
<i>T. Benj.</i>	<i>Testament of Benjamin</i>
<i>T. Dan</i>	<i>Testament of Dan</i>
<i>T. Iss.</i>	<i>Testament of Issachar</i>
<i>T. Jos.</i>	<i>Testament of Joseph</i>
<i>T. Jud.</i>	<i>Testament of Judah</i>
<i>T. Levi</i>	<i>Testament of Levi</i>
<i>T. Naph.</i>	<i>Testament of Naphtali</i>
<i>T. Reu.</i>	<i>Testament of Reuben</i>
<i>T. Zeb.</i>	<i>Testament of Zebulun</i>

### DEAD SEA SCROLLS

Dead Sea Scrolls not listed here are cited by cave number followed by the letter Q (for Qumran) and the document number (e.g., 4Q175).

CD	<i>Damascus Document</i>
1QH	<i>Hodayot (Thanksgiving Psalms)</i>
1QM	<i>Milḥamah (War Scroll)</i>
1QS	<i>Serek Hayaḥad (Rule of the Community / Manual of Discipline)</i>
1QSb	<i>Rule of the Blessings (1Q28b)</i>
4QMMT	<i>Some Observances of the Law (4Q394–399)</i>

### RABBINIC WORKS

The letters prefixed to the names of Mishnaic tractates indicate the following sources: Mishnah (*m.*), Tosefta (*t.*), Babylonian Talmud (*b.*), and Jerusalem/Palestinian Talmud (*y.*).

<i>'Abot</i>	<i>'Abot</i>
<i>Ber.</i>	<i>Berakot</i>
<i>Gen. Rab.</i>	<i>Genesis Rabbah</i>
<i>Ketub.</i>	<i>Ketubbot</i>
<i>Pesiq. Rab.</i>	<i>Pesiqta Rabbati</i>
<i>Qidd.</i>	<i>Qidduṣin</i>
<i>Soṭah</i>	<i>Soṭah</i>

### APOSTOLIC FATHERS

<i>1 Clem.</i>	<i>1 Clement</i>
<i>Diogn.</i>	<i>Diognetus</i>

## Ancient Authors

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ARISTOTLE		<i>Gall.</i>	<i>Gallus</i>
<i>Rhet.</i>	<i>Rhetoric</i>	<i>Sat.</i>	<i>Saturnalia</i>
DEMETRIUS		ORIGEN	
<i>Eloc.</i>	<i>De elocutione</i> <i>(Peri hermēneias)</i>	<i>Cels.</i>	<i>Against Celsus</i>
DEMOSTHENES		PHILO	
1, 2, 4 <i>Philip.</i>	1, 2, 4 <i>Philippic</i>	<i>Confusion</i>	<i>On the Confusion of Tongues</i>
		<i>Dreams</i>	<i>On Dreams</i>
		<i>Sacrifices</i>	<i>On the Sacrifices of Cain and Abel</i>
DIO CHRYSOSTOM		<i>Spec. Laws</i>	<i>On the Special Laws</i>
<i>Alex.</i>	<i>Ad Alexandrinos (Or. 32)</i>	<i>Unchange-</i>	
<i>Consuet.</i>	<i>De consuetudine (Or. 76)</i>	<i>able</i>	<i>That God Is Unchangeable</i>
EPICLETUS		PLATO	
<i>Diatr.</i>	<i>Diatribai (Dissertationes)</i>	<i>Euthyphr.</i>	<i>Euthyphro</i>
EURIPIDES		<i>Phaedr.</i>	<i>Phaedrus</i>
<i>Orest.</i>	<i>Orestes</i>	<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politicus</i>
HOMER		PLUTARCH	
<i>Il.</i>	<i>Iliad</i>	<i>Apoph. Lac.</i>	<i>Apophthegmata Laconica</i>
		<i>Mor.</i>	<i>Moralia</i>
JEROME		<i>Them.</i>	<i>Themistocles</i>
<i>Epist.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>	<i>Tim.</i>	<i>Timoleon</i>
JOHN CHRYSOSTOM		SENECA (THE YOUNGER)	
<i>Hom. 2 Cor.</i>	<i>Homiliae in epistolam II ad Corinthios</i>	<i>Ben.</i>	<i>De beneficiis</i>
JOSEPHUS		THEODORET OF CYR	
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Antiquities of the Jews</i>	<i>2 Cor.</i>	<i>Commentary on Second Corinthians</i>
LUCIAN		XENOPHON	
<i>Cat.</i>	<i>Cataplus</i>	<i>Cyr.</i>	<i>Cyropaedia</i>

## Series, Collections, and Reference Works

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ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
BDF	<i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Edited by F. Blass and A. Debrunner. Translated and revised by Robert W. Funk. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.

## Abbreviations

- EDNT* *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–93.
- PG* *Patrologia graeca* [= *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca*]. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 162 volumes. Paris, 1857–66 (index, 1912).
- PL* *Patrologia latina* [= *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series latina*]. Edited by J.-P. Migne. 221 vols. Paris, 1844–65 (with indexes).
- TLNT* *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*. By Ceslas Spicq. Translated and edited by James D. Ernest. 3 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.



# Second Corinthians



# Introduction



The ancient city of Corinth, described in Strabo's *Geography*, was destroyed by the Roman general Lucius Mummius in 146 BCE. A little more than a century later (44 BCE) Julius Caesar refounded the city as a Roman colony, *Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis*. In 29 BCE the Roman emperor established the province of Achaia, with Corinth as its capital. The geography of the area is roughly equivalent to the southern part of modern Greece.

The city was located at the crossroads of two major trade routes, one by sea, the other by land. Located on a narrow isthmus, Corinth controlled the port of Cenchreae to the east and the port of Lechaem to the west. Corinth was therefore a port city with access eastward through the Saronic Gulf to the Aegean Sea and westward through the Gulf of Corinth to the Adriatic Sea. Seafarers departed from the ports of Corinth for such far-off destinations as Rome and Ephesus (cf. Acts 18:18–19). A north-south land route, the Peloponnesian Way, provided access between Corinth and the Roman province of Macedonia to the north. Strategically located at the juncture of these two important trade routes, the city of Corinth became a major mercantile and cosmopolitan center. In addition, the city hosted the biennial Isthmian Games, which celebrated the unity of the Greek people.

## **Paul's Missionary Visit to Corinth and His Correspondence with the Corinthians**

Paul's missionary strategy led him to make use of the Roman routes, which provided access to important centers of population. Accordingly Paul stopped at Corinth during his second missionary voyage, somewhere around 50 CE. Luke gives a stylized account of that visit in Acts 18:1–18, but Paul's extant

correspondence with the Corinthians offers no precise confirmation of the details of the visit as described by Luke.

Luke's account of the visit states that Paul stayed in Corinth a considerable time, about a year and a half (Acts 18:1–5, 11, 18). That Paul wrote letters to the church of God at Corinth confirms that he had been successful in evangelizing at least some of the Corinthians, a task in which he was joined by Silvanus and Timothy (2 Cor. 1:19; cf. 1 Cor. 1:1; Acts 18:5). His extant correspondence includes two letters to the Corinthians, but these were not the only letters that Paul wrote to the church of God in Corinth. First Corinthians 5:9 mentions an earlier letter in which Paul warned his addressees to shun sexually immoral people. Second Corinthians 2:3–4 mentions another letter, written by a stressed-out Paul (cf. 2:9; 7:8, 12). Thus the two extant letters to the Corinthians are but two pieces of a more extensive correspondence that included at least one letter from the Corinthians to Paul (1 Cor. 7:1).

The rest of the correspondence has been lost. All that remains are the two letters that are part of the NT, the so-called First Letter to the Corinthians and the so-called Second Letter to the Corinthians. Their enumerated titles do not refer to the sequence in which they were written; rather, in accordance with the stylometric principle at work in the compilation of the NT, 1 Corinthians is called “first” because it is longer than the other letter, the “second.” It is commonly agreed, however, that 2 Corinthians was, in fact, written after 1 Corinthians. With sixteen chapters, 1 Corinthians comes immediately after Romans in the canonical NT, where it is followed by 2 Corinthians. With its 13 chapters and 256 verses, as the text was divided into chapters by Stephen Langton (1150–1228) and into verses by Stephanus (Robert Estienne, 1503–59), 2 Corinthians is the third-longest letter in the Pauline epistolary corpus.

The text of 2 Corinthians is well attested in the ancient manuscript tradition. The oldest more or less complete copy of the text is found on a papyrus that dates back to about 200 CE (P<sup>46</sup>) and is now preserved in Dublin's Chester Beatty Library. This papyrus copy of the letter is missing only two verses, 11:11 and 11:22. Wear and tear on the papyrus has taken its toll, however slight the loss may have been. Another papyrus manuscript, dating from around 400 CE and also located in Beatty Library (P<sup>99</sup>), contains considerable portions of the text, while some few verses are found on a seventh-century papyrus (P<sup>34</sup>) now kept in Vienna's National Library.

Two of the oldest uncial manuscripts, the fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus (S) and the fourth-century Codex Vaticanus (B), contain the letter in its entirety. Two of the fifth-century uncials are not as useful for studying the text of 2 Corinthians. The Codex Alexandrinus (A) contains only 4:14–12:6. The text found on a palimpsest (scraped and reused) manuscript, the Codex Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus (C)—the parchment containing 2 Corinthians was later reused to make copies of Ephraem's sermons—has suffered the fate of many a palimpsest. Only 1:1–2 and 10:8–13:13 have been preserved.

## Paul's Letter

The text of 2 Corinthians preserved in the manuscript tradition has the form of a letter, a long one by ancient standards. It begins with an epistolary salutation (1:1–2) and concludes with a letter closing that resembles the closings of many Hellenistic letters.

### *Self-Revelation*

Demetrius, one of the oldest theorists to write about the art of letter writing, declared: “The letter, like the dialogue, should abound in glimpses of character. It may be said that everybody reveals his own soul in his letters. In every other form of composition it is possible to discern the writer’s character, but none so clearly as in the epistolary” (*Eloc.* 227). Paul, a Jew from Tarsus, was probably not aware of Demetrius’s characterization of the letter, but the apostle to the Corinthians really does reveal his soul in 2 Corinthians.

He speaks about his being afflicted and in need of consolation. Paul mentions being weighed down and having a near-death experience, from which he was delivered by God. He refers to his sadness yet being able to rejoice. He speaks of his distress, anguish, and tears. He mentions his forgiveness of someone who has hurt him. He speaks about his restlessness and the many hardships that he has suffered. He speaks about his confidence and boldness, even when he is accused of timidity and levity. Paul tells of his love for the Corinthians, how he has opened his heart to them and they have not returned his love. He writes about his weakness and his boasting. Reluctantly he speaks about his visions and his revelations. He speaks about the thorn in his flesh and how he narrowly escaped the clutches of a regional king. He even talks about the difficulties caused by Satan. Most of all he speaks about his ministry, passionately and imaginatively. He defends the conduct of his ministry and his own personal integrity. An occasional oath punctuates his self-defense. Paul, in fact, reveals so much of himself in this letter that it can aptly be called the most personal of his letters.

### *The Spoken Word*

The passion with which Paul writes is evident on every sheet of the ancient papyri manuscripts and in every chapter of our modern versions of the text. Paul’s is the passion of the orator. His letters were dictated to an unknown scribe. He spoke his letters, rather than physically writing them himself. This was customary in the Hellenistic world. It was one of the reasons why Demetrius could compare letter writing with a dialogue. Yet Paul was no ordinary letter writer. He was an evangelist and preacher of the gospel. In secular terms he was an orator. In dictating this letter he used some of his customary rhetorical devices and the figurative language that his contemporaries considered to be persuasive.

Demetrius counseled against disconnected words and breaks in sentences. “Frequent breaks in a sentence,” he wrote, “are not appropriate in letters. Such breaks cause obscurity in writing, and the gift of imitating conversation is less appropriate to writing than to speech in debate” (*Eloc.* 226). Yet Paul was engaged in a debate, to some degree with the Corinthians, to a greater degree with interlopers who introduced into the faith community at Corinth a gospel that apparently diverged from the gospel that Paul preached. The passionate debate in which Paul was engaged led to the disconnected words, omitted words, breaks in sentences, and interrupted thoughts that appear throughout the letter. Often he begins to speak about something, breaks the flow of his thought, and then returns to the original topic a verse or several verses later. Sometimes he uses participles, even a string of them, where verbs in the indicative are called for. In sum, Paul’s passion sometimes interferes with the clarity of his expression of thought.

Much of the language of the letter is unusual for Paul. Unusual grammatical constructions are also to be found. The letter contains a large number of hapax legomena, words and phrases occurring here and nowhere else in his letters. Some, but not all, of these will be noted in the course of the commentary. Many of these hapax are not found elsewhere in the NT; some do not appear elsewhere in the entire Greek Bible. Some words in the letter seem to have been coined by Paul since there is no literary evidence for their use prior to their appearance in 2 Corinthians. One notable example is the composite word “false apostles,” a single word in Greek (*pseudapostoloi*, 11:13). Paul also calls them “superapostles” (*hoi hyperlian apostoloi*, 11:5; 12:11). The incidence of this rare vocabulary may be due to the heat of the debate, as the novel “false apostles” exemplifies.

Unlike the theological debate to which the Letter to the Galatians attests, the debate in which Paul engages in 2 Corinthians is eminently personal. That he is engaged in a debate has probably contributed to his unusual vocabulary in yet another way. On occasion he seems to have borrowed some of the phraseology used by the interlopers.

### *Half a Conversation*

Demetrius wrote that “Artemon, the editor of Aristotle’s *Letters*, says that a letter ought to be written in the same manner as a dialogue, a letter being regarded by him as one of the two sides of a dialogue” (*Eloc.* 223). This is almost a truism, but the fact that it is true creates a difficulty for the interpretation of 2 Corinthians. Paul sometimes imparts new information to the Corinthians, with the result that we are hardly any more disadvantaged in understanding what he writes than were the Corinthians. This is certainly the case when he tells the Corinthians that he wants them to know about his near-death experience in Asia. To introduce the topic, he employs his customary disclosure formula: “We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters” (1:8; cf.

8:1). The way he speaks about his visions and revelations (12:1–5) leads us to think that he had never before spoken about this issue.

On the other hand, there are experiences alluded to by Paul that were well known to the Corinthians. He speaks about his painful visit to the community, a visit so painful that he put off visiting again. He speaks about a tearful letter that he wrote. Presumably it was received and read by the Corinthians. He mentions a malefactor who was punished by the Corinthians. He mentions the collection for the saints that had started a year previously. Paul talks about Titus's visit to the Corinthians and how Titus had experienced the Corinthians' change of heart. He compares himself with the superapostles but does not really tell us much about them. There are so many other things that we would like to know about the situation in Corinth, but our only source of information is this letter, and it is just half of the conversation. Readers of the letter should be wary lest they consider facts to be self-evident or otherwise attested when the only source of information is Paul's hints and allusions.

In this respect we are considerably disadvantaged in comparison with the Corinthians. Not only had they experienced many of the things that Paul mentions and were therefore fully aware of what he was writing about, but they also had the letter read to them. There was no formal postal service in Paul's day. Letters were carried to their addressees either by a passing traveler co-opted for this task or by a trusted intermediary. Titus may have been the designated letter carrier who brought 2 Corinthians to the assembly in Corinth. In addition to reading the letter to the Corinthians, the letter carrier would have been available to fill in the gaps and answer questions. Both the letter writer and its recipients would have been aware of this additional source of information.

### *A Real Letter*

Despite the difficulties that a modern interpreter encounters in trying to understand what Paul wrote, it is obvious that he was self-consciously engaged in the writing of a letter. None of his other letters draws as much attention to the writing of letters as does 2 Corinthians.

He speaks about the now-lost tearful letter, telling the Corinthians why he wrote it (2:3; 7:12) and his motivation in writing as he did (2:4, 9).

He writes about letters of recommendation, apparently because the interlopers came to Corinth bearing letters of recommendation (3:1–3). In this context he mentions the materials used in letter writing: ink and tablets. He says that he himself needed no letter of recommendation. Who could have recommended him, appointed to his apostolic task, as he was, by the will of God?

The recommendation of Titus and the other emissaries in 8:16–17, 23 has elements found in letters of recommendation and provides a hint that

Titus might have been the carrier of the letter. Frequently Hellenistic letter writers wrote letters of commendation on behalf of the letter carrier, attesting to the trustworthiness of the letter carrier and asking the recipients to provide the letter carrier with amenities and hospitality.

Finally, he speaks about the writing of this very missive. He tells the Corinthians that he writes only what they can understand (1:13). He tells them a bit about his purpose in writing (7:12; 13:10). And cleverly he tells them that he has no need to write to them about the collection (9:1). Then he proceeds to write about it.

## The Course of Events

With the clues provided in the two letters to the Corinthians, it is possible to trace the course of events in Paul's relationship with the Corinthians. It is, however, impossible to determine with any precision when these events happened.

### *A First Visit and Two Letters*

The beginning is obviously Paul's visit to Corinth during the course of his second missionary voyage (ca. 50 CE). Paul wrote a follow-up letter to the community, urging them to avoid immoral persons (1 Cor. 5:9). What led to the letter and what else, if anything, it said remain unknown to us. If the letter at all resembled Paul's other letters, it would have been somewhat long and would have addressed other topics. In any case, the issue of immorality seems not to have disappeared. Not only did Paul address the issue in 1 Corinthians, but he again alludes to it in 2 Cor. 6:16–7:1; 12:20–21.

Paul followed this letter up with another letter, occasioned at least partially by the report of Chloe's people (1 Cor. 1:11) and a letter that he had received from the Corinthians themselves. The tone of this letter (1 Corinthians) is clearly less harsh than the tone of 2 Corinthians. The letter addressed a whole host of issues, especially various issues that threatened the unity of the community. Among them was the pride that some people took in the spiritual gifts that had been granted them, displaying their sense of superiority vis-à-vis other members of the community. Toward the end of that letter, written from Ephesus around 53 CE, Paul announced his intention to return to Corinth, traveling by land from Macedonia (1 Cor. 16:5–9). His intention seems to have been to take a boat from Ephesus to Macedonia and then go to Corinth, probably traveling along the Peloponnesian Way.

### *A Second Visit and Another Letter*

While he was in Ephesus, something happened in Corinth that led Paul to change his plans. We do not know how Paul found out about difficulties in



Corinth—he may have been informed by Timothy (cf. 1 Cor. 16:10–11)—but whatever the issues were, they were sufficiently serious for Paul to return directly to Corinth, most likely by sea. It remains possible, however, that Paul simply changed his mind, deciding to go first to Corinth and then travel north to the province of Macedonia.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul suggests two sources of the problems in Corinth. On the one hand, preachers arrived in Corinth with a version of the gospel not entirely consistent with Paul's. They seem to have disparaged his ministry. Among other things, they disdained the fact that he worked to support himself while he preached the gospel. Working to support oneself seems to have been, for them, beneath the dignity of a preacher of the gospel.

Another issue was caused by a miscreant, probably a member of the community, who created trouble for Paul or for someone who was very close to him. It is most likely the apostle himself who was offended. We do not know the precise nature of the offense, but the community was complicit in the offense insofar as it did not take the malefactor to task, at least for some time.

The visit did not go well. Paul was saddened and pained by what he experienced. The visit was probably short. Paul returned to Ephesus, his base of operations at the time. Lest another visit be equally difficult for him, Paul again changed his mind. He decided to send another letter to the Corinthians instead of visiting them as he had first intended to do (2 Cor. 2:1). This letter was probably delivered by Titus (8:6), whose main mission was most likely to continue the work of the collection announced in 1 Cor. 16:1–4. This was the tearful letter (2:3–4), which Paul sent to test the mettle of the community (2:9). Were they obedient in every respect?

#### *Titus's Visit and Yet Another Letter, 2 Corinthians*

Paul waited in Ephesus for a while, then went north to the port of Troas. Perhaps he had prearranged to meet Titus there. Paul used the time to evangelize the city (2:12), but he grew restless because Titus did not arrive. So Paul moved on to Macedonia (2:13), perhaps to Philippi, where there was a supportive community of believers. In Macedonia, Paul met Titus, who delivered a fairly upbeat report. On the one hand, the community had repented and taken steps—perhaps the measures taken were overly harsh measures!—to punish the miscreant. On the other hand, the members of the community were eager to receive Paul once again.

Titus's report cheered Paul up. There were, nonetheless, lingering difficulties. The interlopers were still around; at least their influence was still being felt insofar as Paul's authority continued to be called into question. Moreover, the issues of immorality and disunity seem not to have been totally resolved. The situation was, nonetheless, sufficiently calm for Paul to make three decisions. First, he would send Titus back to complete the work of the collection. Second, he would write a letter—extant 2 Corinthians—in which he would explain

and defend his ministry. The letter was probably written toward the end of 54 CE. Third, he would make another visit to Corinth, for which his letter would serve as preparation. Romans 15:25–31 suggests that this visit occurred when Paul arrived in Corinth to take the proceeds of the collection to Jerusalem.

## Critical Issues

The historical-critical method of biblical interpretation began to be developed in earnest in the nineteenth century. The method seeks to determine the history of the text and the history behind the text. With regard to 2 Corinthians, one question of each sort has been especially debated in recent decades.

### *The History of the Text*

The ancient manuscripts contain the text of 2 Corinthians, such as it appears in Greek in the edition of Nestle-Aland (NA<sup>28</sup>) and *The Greek New Testament* (UBS<sup>4</sup>). As is always the case with ancient manuscripts, there are some minor discrepancies among the various ancient texts. For the most part, the variants are due to scribal error, perhaps even erroneous “corrections” on the part of “knowledgeable” scribes. The editors responsible for the above-mentioned editions have resolved the issues to the best of their ability and have produced the Greek text on which modern translations are based.

There is, however, another issue with regard to the history of the text of 2 Corinthians that concerns contemporary critics. This issue is the unity of the text that has been handed down. Demetrius says that “there should be a certain degree of freedom in the structure of a letter” (*Eloc.* 229). Thus Paul cannot be blamed for producing a letter that does not evince the unity that is characteristic of an essay or a sustained argument in a court of law. There are, nonetheless, certain aspects of 2 Corinthians that have led many commentators to question whether the letter has any real structure at all. Is it so unstructured that it lacks any real unity?

As one begins to read Paul’s letter, one finds that Paul has been smoothly developing his thought, talking about the sadness of his second visit, defending his change of travel plans, and mentioning his desolation at not finding Titus. Then suddenly, in 2:15, Paul interrupts his thought. Saying “Thanks be to God,” he begins a long theological reflection. The theological reflection on Paul’s ministry continues until 7:4, when his thought is suddenly interrupted once again, and Paul returns to the train of thought that he abandoned in 2:14. In 7:5 Paul talks about being in Macedonia, where he meets Titus and his sadness turns to joy. So 7:5 seems to follow naturally after 2:14.

The next strikingly abrupt transition occurs at 6:13. Paul has been speaking personally and somewhat emotionally to the Corinthians, telling them that his wide-open feelings for them contrast with their restricted feelings for him.

Suddenly he begins to tell them (6:14), using imaginative and then scriptural language, that they should not be in league with nonbelievers. Then in 7:2 he picks up the biological imagery of 6:13, asking the Corinthians to make room in their hearts for him. What he writes in 7:2–4 seems, logically, to follow immediately after 6:13.

Once back to Titus and the joy-producing report that Titus gave on meeting Paul, the apostle switches gears in 8:1. Instead of continuing to tell the Corinthians about the report, Paul says that he wants to give them some new information, treating an issue that has nothing to do with what he has been writing about. Without any apology for switching his train of thought, Paul says that he wants to tell the Corinthians about the Macedonians and God's gracious gift to them (8:1). Paul uses the example of the Macedonians to urge the Corinthians to participate in a collection on behalf of God's holy people in Jerusalem, an appeal that appears to have been interrupted because of the course of events narrated above.

The appeal continues throughout chapter 8, but in what is now the beginning of chapter 9, Paul introduces the topic of the collection as if for the first time. "For, to be sure," he writes, "it is superfluous for me to write to you about the service to the saints" (9:1). True, in chapter 8 he has talked about the practicalities of the collection, and in chapter 9 he provides a theological underpinning, but it is strange that he should seem to be bringing up the topic of the collection in 9:1 for the first time.

Then, having finished his remarks about the collection in 9:15, Paul begins to defend himself again (10:1). The tone of this self-defense is much harsher than the tone that he adopted earlier in the letter (1:3–2:1; 7:5–16). It hardly seems to be at home with the earlier passage, whose words were conciliatory. Moreover, it seems out of place after Titus's report that the Corinthians are ready to embrace Paul and presumably his message as well.

In sum, the extant text of 2 Corinthians has abrupt transitions (aporias) after 2:14; 6:13; 7:1; 7:4; 7:16; 8:24; and 9:15. For more than a millennium the text of 2 Corinthians was handed down without division into chapter and verse. For the modern reader of the text, chapter divisions inserted after 7:16; 8:24; and 9:15 soften the abruptness of the transitions. The contemporary reader has been conditioned by these divisions to think that Paul introduces new topics at what are now 8:1; 9:1; and 10:1.

During the historical-critical era of biblical scholarship, these abrupt transitions in the text have prompted scholars to look for some explanation. One proposal that has emerged is that extant 2 Corinthians is not a text that Paul dictated in one prolonged session. Rather, they opine, the text of 2 Corinthians that has been handed down through the centuries was not originally a single text but is a composite text compiled from as many as six different letter fragments. Some anonymous editor would have put them all together, using just one opening salutation and one letter closing, rather

than incorporating a number of presumably similar opening salutations and letter closings.

Given the nature of the Paideia commentary series, it is not necessary to go into the variations on the compilation theory in any detail. An in-depth study of the issue would divert attention from the way that Paul spoke to the Corinthians through his letter and an understanding of what he wanted to tell them. Instead, I offer the opinion of Hans Dieter Betz as an example, actually a good example, of a theory suggesting that extant and canonical 2 Corinthians is the result of scribal compilation of earlier text fragments (“Corinthians, Second Epistle to,” *ABD* 1:1148–54). Betz holds that the present text results from the compilation of six fragments of earlier texts, five of which come from letters written by Paul:

1. A lengthy and imaginative theological disquisition on Paul’s ministry, the “first apology” (2:14–6:13; 7:2–4)
2. A harsh letter, the “second apology” (10:1–13:13), most likely the letter of tears to which Paul refers in 2:3–4
3. A conciliatory letter (1:1–2:13; 7:5–16) written on the occasion of Titus’s uplifting report on the readiness of the Corinthians to embrace Paul
4. An “administrative letter” telling about the organization of a renewed appeal for support of the sainted poor people in Jerusalem (chap. 8)
5. A second “administrative letter” providing a theological rationale for the collection (chap. 9)
6. A later interpolation of a piece (6:14–7:1) that urges separation from unbelievers and was written by a hand other than that of Paul

According to this theory, the letter of tears has not been lost. It has been substantially preserved in 10:1–13:13. The idea that 6:14–7:1 is an interpolation is held not only by critics who hold that extant 2 Corinthians is a compilation of letter fragments; many other scholars also hold that 6:14–7:1 is a later interpolation into Paul’s text. This issue will be discussed further at the pertinent place in the commentary.

Betz’s compilation theory supposes a course of events that differs somewhat from the course of events that I have traced. In fact, most compilation theories require the reconstruction of a different course of events. Any construction of a course of events, including mine, is based on a reading of the texts. As a reading of the text differs, so the reconstruction of events must differ.

That the various compilation theories differ from one another weighs against the hasty embrace of any one of them. If the text was produced as a result of the compilation of letter fragments, the scribal effort was done very early in the history of the church.  $\mathfrak{D}^{46}$  shows that 2 Corinthians has existed in its present form for the past eighteen centuries. The text that has been handed down will be followed in the commentary that follows.

*The History behind the Text*

My reconstruction of the course of events is, of course, history behind the text, but there is another issue that has intrigued scholars since the dawn of the historical-critical era of biblical scholarship, especially during the past several decades. That issue is the identity of Paul's opponents, the superapostles, as he disparagingly calls them in 11:5; 12:11. Who were they? Where did they come from? What was their theology? If they brought letters of recommendation (3:1), who was their sponsor? Why were they opposed to the Pauline mission?

Virtually the only source of information available to answer these questions is 2 Corinthians itself, but the letter does not provide sufficient information to satisfy our historical curiosity. It seems, however, that these opponents, whom I call "interlopers" since they came from outside the community (11:4), are not to be identified with the puffed-up persons with whom Paul takes issue in 1 Corinthians. The matters addressed in 2 Corinthians are different from the issues raised in 1 Corinthians. It is likely, therefore, that the interlopers arrived in Corinth after 1 Corinthians was sent. Moreover, the source of trouble in Corinth was different from the source of trouble in Galatia. Paul does not speak about the observance of the law and the issue of circumcision in 2 Corinthians. Accordingly, it would be a mistake to identify the intruders of 2 Corinthians with Paul's opponents in Galatia.

Paul readily admits that the interlopers are Jewish Christians (11:22–23a). Accordingly a number of scholars consider that they were Judaizers of one sort or another. That they appear as servants of righteousness (11:15) is another reason to pursue the line of reasoning that identifies the troublesome intruders as Judaizers. Paul's disquisition on Moses and the covenant in chapter 3 adds support to this kind of argument.

Other scholars take another tack, drawing attention to the fact that Paul spells out charismatic activity as the signs of an apostle. He also speaks about his visions and revelations (12:1–5), a topic that does not appear in any of his other letters. That these appear in a polemical context suggests that Paul is trying to match his opponents' claims to have been the beneficiaries of visions and revelations. Thus, a second group of scholars pursues a line of reasoning that identifies the interlopers as Spirit-people, as people who attribute special value to charismatic activity.

A third group of scholars tries to combine the two lines of reasoning. One recent attempt to do so was made by Thomas R. Blanton (2010, 150–51):

Paul's missionary rivals espoused a standard covenant renewal theologoumenon. . . . They were individuals striving to mediate the renewed covenant between God and humans. Adherence to this covenant, they held, was facilitated by God's gracious gift of the spirit, a spirit that transformed human intentionality so that perfect obedience to the stipulations of the Torah could be construed as an attractive possibility.

In the end, we cannot identify the interlopers with any precision. Paul does not tell us much about their theology except to say that they preached another Jesus, another gospel, and another Spirit (11:4–5). Their attacks on Paul seem to be largely of a personal nature. They accuse him of walking according to the flesh (10:2). They say that his physical presence is weak and his speech contemptible (10:11). They question his integrity on a number of counts, particularly with regard to the collection.

In response, Paul does not directly address their different theology. He defends his ministry and his personal integrity. He seems to think that the interlopers have intruded into his territory (10:13–14). He acknowledges their greater rhetorical skill (11:6). He concedes that, nonetheless, they are Christian (10:7), indeed, servants of Christ (11:23). For the most part, Paul’s arguments against them are personal, of the *ad hominem* variety. The interlopers peddle the word of God (2:17). Apparently they need letters of recommendation (3:1). They praise themselves and compare themselves to one another (10:12). They seek support and so burden the community (11:7–12). Paul describes them as seducers (11:3) and deceitful (11:13). He derides them as superapostles (11:5; 12:11) and calls them false apostles (11:13). They are servants of Satan who disguise themselves as servants of righteousness (11:15). Paul’s caricature provides little help to us who would like to identify exactly who the interlopers were and how many of them there were.

## The Structure of the Letter

The harsh connections noted above allow the letter, apart from its opening salutation and its epistolary closing, to be divided into five parts. It may be useful for us to review, in summary fashion, the way Paul develops his thought before we begin more intense scrutiny of what he has to say in this admittedly complex text.

### *The Letter Opening (1:1–2)*

Introducing his fellow evangelist Timothy as a “coauthor,” Paul begins his letter in a manner that was familiar to those who wrote and read letters in the Hellenistic world. He identifies his addressees as the assembly of God in Corinth but says that he wants the message to extend beyond Corinth, to those in the outlying districts of Achaia. He greets all of them with a greeting that bears a distinctively Christian character and is a hallmark of all his letters.

### *Ministerial Crises (1:3–2:13)*

Instead of following up his letter with the customary thanksgiving, Paul opens the body of the letter with a beautiful prayer of praise suggesting that all has not been well for Paul. He prays to the God of all consolation, who has consoled him in the midst of all his afflictions. He gives thanks to God,

who has delivered him from these afflictions, expressing the hope that he will be similarly delivered in the future. To give an example of his affliction, the apostle tells the Corinthians about his terrifying experience in Asia.

Then, intimating that he had a change of plans that caused some people to think of him as fickle, Paul tells about a seemingly previously unplanned visit to Corinth that made him sad. Someone in particular was the cause of his pain. So instead of returning to Corinth, where he feared that he might have another sad experience, Paul wrote the now-lost letter of tears to the Corinthians. He wrote the letter with distress and anguish. Through it all Paul hoped that his love for the Corinthians came through.

Apparently something of what Paul had written was taken to heart by the Corinthians. They punished the malefactor, perhaps excessively. Enough is enough, says Paul: now is the time for forgiveness and love. Paul adds that he himself has forgiven the troublemaker. Paul desires the reconciliation and encouragement of the malefactor lest this person fall into the wily clutches of Satan.

Shifting the train of thought from the Corinthians back to himself, Paul tells the Corinthians that he went to Troas to await the arrival of Titus. He had a good opportunity to evangelize in Troas, but he was restless because he failed to meet Titus and thus moved on.

#### *Paul Explains and Defends His Apostolic Ministry (2:14–7:4)*

With another abrupt change of thought, Paul offers thanks to God for a ministry that he describes in figurative language as his participation in a triumphal procession. He raises the issue of his being qualified for this ministry and responds that if he is qualified, it is only because God has made him capable of exercising the ministry. He is confident in the exercise of his ministry, but a problem looms on the horizon. Some people have arrived in Corinth bearing letters of recommendation. Paul needs no such letter because the faith of the Corinthians, available for all to see, is proof that he is qualified. They are Paul's letter of recommendation.

Having identified the service in which he and Timothy are engaged as a ministry of a new covenant, Paul begins to make a comparison with the ministry of the earlier covenant epitomized in the Exodus story of Moses and the stone tablets. That ministry was indeed glorious, but its ministry is passing away. The ministry of Moses is but a shadow of the ministry of the glory of Christ, the image of God. As servants of Jesus and ministers of the new covenant, Paul is able to commend himself and at least Timothy among his companions.

Paul is, however, aware of his own fragility and weakness. A comparison with vessels of clay is used to speak about his human condition. A rehearsal of some of the difficulties that were his during the exercise of his ministry further illustrates his human condition. But Paul has not succumbed to these difficulties. His difficulties allow the dying of Christ to be evident in his body. He has confidence for he believes in the resurrection. What he is doing will



result in life for the community and glory for God. As he continues to ponder his human condition, Paul does not lose heart. Various metaphors allow him to describe his mortality and the future that awaits him.

Then, turning his thought back to the Corinthians, Paul expresses his heartfelt love for the community. He wishes only that they would requite his love. They seem not to have done that. Somehow their affection for him is restricted. In the midst of his paternal appeal for love appears a seemingly intrusive passage that warns the Corinthians to avoid the kind of conduct that is associated with nonbelievers.

*The Arrival and Report of Titus (7:5–16)*

Resuming the thought that he has interrupted to speak about his ministry and himself as minister, Paul picks up on the idea of going to Macedonia. Having arrived in Macedonia, he received great consolation in the form of the arrival of Titus. The presence of Titus might have been enough, but the news that he brought was all the more encouraging. Titus has reported that the Corinthians are now eager for Paul; they have experienced a real change of heart. The harsh letter that he had sent has produced its effect; the pain that the Corinthians experienced on receiving it was short lived. Compounding Paul's joy is the fact that Titus is joyful. He too is encouraged by the obedience of the Corinthians.

*Service to God's Holy People (8:1–9:15)*

Paul then takes up another topic. He wants to tell the Corinthians about the grace of God given to the churches of Macedonia. That grace was their willingness to share what little they had with others, the "saints [in Jerusalem]." The apostle tells the Corinthians about the Macedonians' generosity because he wants to motivate the Corinthians to respond generously to the needs of the saints. That example might be enough, but Paul gives an additional model, that of the Lord Jesus Christ, who impoverished himself for our sake. Paul's idea is not that God's holy people in Jerusalem should become rich; it is rather that there should be parity among the churches. Who knows? Someday the Corinthians might need help.

Paul wants Titus to continue with the ministry of the collection, following a few directives that Paul sets down. Titus is ready and eager to take on the responsibility. Two companions are appointed to assist Titus: one known to the churches, who has once been Paul's traveling companion, and the other a person whom Paul has tested and found to be zealous. Paul expresses the hope that the collection will be successful and that the pride that he has in the Corinthians will prove to be justified.

With a somewhat formal introduction, Paul brings up the topic of the collection anew. He says that Titus and companions are an advance team and are



to attend to the collection when the Corinthians' generosity will justify his pride in them. In this second go-around on the topic of the collection, God is the focal point of Paul's theological motivation. God has been generous to the Corinthians. God loves the one who gives generously. Through their generosity the Corinthians will demonstrate their obedience to the gospel and will glorify God. Throughout his exposition on the collection, Paul toys with the idea of "grace." It is the language that Paul uses to speak of the Corinthians' gift to the saints, but the terminology implies so much more than mere gift.

*An Aggressive Taskmaster (10:1–13:10)*

Paul's earlier defense of his ministry was relatively mild in tone. Now he tells the Corinthians that he is ready to be bold and aggressive. He employs the imagery of a military attack to describe how he is ready to defend the gospel against the sophistries that have been raised up against it. The Lord has given him authority. Paul stands ready to use that authority both in letter and in person, for building up but not for tearing down. There will be no difference between what he says and what he writes. Paul, however, is not reckless and unrestrained. He acts in accordance with the authority that the Lord has given him and the standards that God has established. If he has any boast, he can boast in the Lord, in what the Lord does through him.

He may have made a subtle swipe at the interlopers when he talked about maintaining standards and keeping within assigned boundaries, but he takes them on in earnest as he hurls a string of invectives at them. They are like the serpent who seduced Eve. The intruders may have taken umbrage at Paul's refusal to accept financial support from the Corinthians, but Paul doesn't want to burden the Corinthians because he loves them. But there is more. The interlopers have presented themselves as apostles of Christ when in fact they are pseudo-apostles and deceitful preachers. They are servants of Satan, who presents himself as an angel of light.

The intensity of Paul's argument increases as he follows the example of the interlopers and boasts about himself. It is foolish for him to do so, but he nonetheless does boast. His "fool's speech" passes in review all sorts of hardships and difficulties that speak about Paul's weakness. He offers two particular examples of weakness that are not mentioned in any of Paul's other letters: his narrow escape from the clutches of King Aretas in Damascus and the thorn in the flesh, a messenger given to him to keep him humble. Paul will not refrain from boasting about his weakness; he willingly exposes his weakness to the Corinthians for he wants them to know that power is perfected in weakness.

Having done what he had to do in the fool's speech, Paul announces that he is now ready to make another visit to the Corinthians, his third. By the time that he arrives, the collection should be completed. Paul offers a bit of defense on behalf of himself and Titus. He has not taken advantage of them, and neither has Titus. Citing his authority, Paul warns them against any lingering

signs of disunity and licentiousness. If he finds such signs on his arrival, he will be severe with them. This will build them up.

Paul's severity will be warranted, as he explains when he comes to the denouement of his speech. Just as Christ was crucified in weakness but lives by God's power, so Paul is weak but by God's power lives with Christ for the sake of the Corinthians. A short exhortation then reminds the Corinthians that Paul has not failed the test. He urges the Corinthians to test themselves lest, when he comes to them, he might need to be severe in exercising the authority that the Lord has given him.

### *The Letter Closing (13:11–13)*

Paul's speech, the *homilia* that constitutes the body of the Second Letter to the Corinthians, comes to its conclusion on that note. Paul ends the letter with a staccato exhortation that recapitulates some of its main themes. He asks the Corinthians to extend greetings to one another and tells them, perhaps in a moment of enthusiasm, that all God's holy people greet them. At the end comes the final benediction, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

## Outline of 2 Corinthians

### **The letter opening (1:1–2)**

The senders of the letter (1:1a)

The recipients of the letter (1:1b)

The greetings (1:2)

### **Ministerial crises (1:3–2:13)**

**A prayer of praise and the Asian experience (1:3–11)**

The berakah (1:3–7)

A near-death experience (1:8–11)

**Paul's defense of his integrity (1:12–2:4)**

The witness of conscience (1:12–14)

Defense against the charge of being fickle (1:15–22)

Skipping a visit to Corinth (1:23–24)

The tearful letter (2:1–4)

**A disciplinary matter (2:5–11)**

**Frustration in Troas (2:12–13)**

### **Paul explains and defends his apostolic ministry (2:14–7:4)**

**Anxiety and confidence (2:14–3:6)**

A triumphal procession (2:14–17)

A letter of recommendation (3:1–3)

Paul's confidence (3:4–6)

**A glorious ministry (3:7–4:6)**

The ministry of righteousness (3:7–11)

Comparison with Moses (3:12–18)

Blindness of nonbelievers (4:1–4)

Proclaiming the Lord Jesus (4:5–6)

**The present and the future (4:7–5:10)**

Earthenware vessels (4:7–12)

Paul's faith (4:13–15)

Daily renewal (4:16–18)

The human condition (5:1–5)

Dwelling with the Lord (5:6–10)

**A ministry of reconciliation  
(5:11–6:10)**

- Paul's confidence (5:11–15)
- Reconciliation (5:16–19)
- Ambassadors for Christ (5:20–21)
- A short exhortation (6:1–2)
- The exercise of Paul's ministry (6:3–10)

**A plea for personal reconciliation  
(6:11–7:4)**

- Paul's open heart (6:11–13)
- A scripturally based exhortation (6:14–7:1)
- Paul's pride and joy (7:2–4)

**The arrival and report of Titus  
(7:5–16)**

- Titus's arrival (7:5–7)**
- Further reflection on the painful letter (7:8–13a)**
- Titus's experience (7:13b–16)**

**Service to God's holy people  
(8:1–9:15)**

- The collection (8:1–24)**
  - The example of the Macedonians (8:1–6)
  - The appeal (8:7–15)
  - Titus and his delegation (8:16–24)

- A further appeal (9:1–15)**
  - Concerning the delegation (9:1–5)
  - Final motivation (9:6–15)

**An aggressive taskmaster  
(10:1–13:10)**

- Paul's missionary task (10:1–18)**
  - Strategic warfare (10:1–6)
  - A warning (10:7–11)
  - Self-commendation (10:12–18)

**On the attack (11:1–15)**

- The Corinthians' betrothal (11:1–4)
- Paul is not inferior to the super-apostles (11:5–6)
- The gospel for free (11:7–12)
- The pseudo-apostles (11:13–15)

**Boasting like a fool (11:16–12:13)**

- Putting up with Paul (11:16–21a)
- A telling comparison (11:21b–23)
- Paul's hardships (11:24–29)
- The escape from Damascus (11:30–33)
- Rapture to the third heaven (12:1–5)
- A thorn in the flesh (12:6–9a)
- Power in weakness (12:9b–10)
- The peroration of a fool's speech (12:11–13)

**Paul's third visit to Corinth  
(12:14–13:10)**

- The announcement (12:14–15)
- A final defense (12:16–18)
- Paul's fears (12:19–21)
- Paul is ready nonetheless (13:1–4)
- Exhortation and a prayer (13:5–10)

**The letter closing (13:11–13)**

- Exhortation (13:11a)**
- Peace prayer (13:11b)**
- Greetings (13:12)**
- Epistolary benediction (13:13)**