

# INTRODUCTION

Studying 2 Corinthians plunges the modern reader back to the real, tumultuous world of early Christianity. The simple ideals of sharing and goodwill described in Acts 2:42-47 seem to have little place among the diverse converts from this boomtown of Corinth where Paul chooses to anchor his Greek mission. Rather, this microcosm of the early church bickers and accuses, revels in disorder and confusion, reeks of unrenounced pagan practices, and uncritically pursues self-promotion and even disloyalty to Paul, its founder.

When we speak of restoring the NT church,<sup>1</sup> the Corinthian church is not what we have in mind. But maybe this is where we should really start: a real community of believers struggling to understand and implement their Christian faith against the helter-skelter backdrop of values and principles they desired to leave behind. As we understand what Paul teaches this troubled church, we will learn badly needed principles to help bring to maturity our own, real churches which inherit the same struggle.

Second Corinthians stands in stark contrast to Paul's other NT writings in a number of ways. Other letters, like 1 Corinthians, Romans, Galatians, and Colossians are carefully ordered, easily outlined, logical, controlled, as Paul confidently responds to carefully gauged concerns. Methodically, he establishes crucial, theological principles as the basis for practical, behavioral appeals.

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<sup>1</sup>Restoration of the practices of the first-century church is a driving principle of the Stone-Campbell movement spurred by such documents as the *Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things*, originally a series of articles in the *Christian Baptist* between February 1825 and June 1829 by Alexander Campbell who was also the editor, and numerous articles in the *Millennial Harbinger*, also edited by Campbell. Restorationism is key to other Christian groups such as Pentecostals.

By contrast, 2 Corinthians is chaotic and disjointed. Digressions lead the reader far afield before returning to the point. So uneven is 2 Corinthians, that many scholars suggest it is a composite of four or five writings, even a number of conservative scholars admitting two. Intensity, emotion, defensiveness, and second-guessing rather than controlled reasoning bind this epistle together. We see Paul at his weakest, basest, most human. Yet seeing him work through the truth of the gospel in the midst of exasperating difficulties is enlightening.<sup>2</sup>

To a certain extent, it is healthy for our lofty ideals of this giant to be punctured and brought down to reality, even as the Corinthian church does so for our view of the early church. Paul's relationship with the Corinthians at this historical juncture is ugly, and readers deserve to be warned about how disconcerting seeing this can be.

These features of 2 Corinthians make studying and understanding the text much more dependent than usual on grasping the historical circumstances behind and leading up to its writing. Without a clear grasp of the historic story, hopeless confusion will engulf efforts to interpret the text at a number of points.

So, study of 2 Corinthians must begin by seeking to understand the Corinth of Paul's day and Paul's relationship to the local church there before preceding to a reliable interpretation of the text.

## THE CITY OF CORINTH

Fortunately, Corinth is a NT city we know a great deal about. It has been heavily excavated and was minutely described by classical writers like Strabo and Dio Chrysostom.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Victor Paul Furnish, "Paul and Corinthians," *Int* 52 (July, 1998): 229.

<sup>3</sup>*The Geography of Strabo IV, Books VIII-IX*, H.L. Jones, trans., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1968); *Dio Chrysostom IV, Discourses XXXVII-LX*, H.L. Crosby, trans., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1962. J. Murphy-O'Connor (*St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* [Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983]) reproduces and evaluates the relevant primary material from Strabo, Dio Chrysostom, and others. Other good sources are James R. Wiseman, *The Land of the Ancient Corinthians*, Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology, 50 (Göteborg: Astroms,

The city that Paul entered in A.D. 50 had been resurrected from the ashes of the old city burned to the ground by the Romans in 146 B.C.<sup>4</sup> Having laid in ruins for 100 years, two years before his death in 44 B.C., Julius Caesar decreed that Corinth (and also Carthage) should be rebuilt. Although located just 60 miles from Athens on the narrow isthmus strategically joining the Greek mainland to the Peloponnesus, the new Corinth was built and organized as a Roman city. Its colonists were gleaned from freedmen, former slaves originating from Syria, Egypt, Judea, Greece, and from retiring Roman soldiers.<sup>5</sup>

The city's layout and its buildings were Roman, as was its governmental organization and law. Its official language was Latin, although Greek was the common language for business and conversation. The people prized Roman articles, importing them in great quantities.<sup>6</sup> In addition to the four magistrates elected each year and its city council, it was administrated by a proconsul appointed annually by the Roman senate.

Corinth's dominance over the five-mile wide isthmus insured economic vitality. Ships traveling between Italy and Asia Minor were happy to pay the fee to cross the isthmus rather than sail the extra 200 miles south around treacherous Cape Malae. Besides, Corinth had even constructed a grooved pavement, called the Diolkos, between the ports on either side of the isthmus on which smaller ships could be hauled in wheeled vehicles. For a larger ship, the goods were loaded on transport carts and reloaded onto another ship waiting at the other harbor.

Julius Caesar dreamed of increasing Corinth's stock by constructing a canal across the isthmus. Not until Nero, A.D. 67., was

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1978); and Donald Engels, *Roman Corinth: An Alternative Model for the Classical City* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990).

<sup>4</sup>James R. Wiseman, "Corinth and Rome I: 228 B.C.-A.D. 267," *ANRW II* (7/1): 438-548.

<sup>5</sup>Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.23; 17.3.15; Plutarch, *Life of Caesar* 47:8. Some of these passages mention freedmen, others retired soldiers. Murphy-O'Connor (*St. Paul's Rome*, p. 66), along with most others, believes the majority were freedmen.

<sup>6</sup>J.W. Hayes, "Roman Pottery from the South Stoa at Corinth," *Hesperia* 42 (1973): 470.

such a project begun. Actual completion, however was not achieved until modern times, in 1893.

With the two ports, Laechaeum, on the Corinthian Gulf, and Cenchraea, on the Saronic Gulf, Corinth thrived as a center for trade. The major land route between the Greek mainland and the Peloponnesus also went through it. Besides shipbuilding and repair, it hosted bronze, tile, and pottery factories, as well as the necessary warehousing for transportable goods. Corinth's market areas boasted hundreds of stalls filled with craftsmen plying their trade, locals selling merchandise and food, as well as visitors from throughout the empire hawking imported items. They even had places which sold drinks cooled by underground water systems. Paul himself, we know, took up a leather-working stall in this area for eighteen months (Acts 18:1-3).

New Corinth was an eclectic, international city from its inception. In Paul's day, it was a bustling, wide open, boomtown, with over 80,000 inhabitants, and growing every day.<sup>7</sup> It had already outstripped Athens politically, replacing it as the capital of Achaia.<sup>8</sup>

Corinth's prestige was further enhanced by its hosting of the Isthmian Games, second only in significance to the Olympics. Held every two years in Corinth since A.D. 3, these games drew thousands of tourists and lots of business. The city's most prestigious political official was the one responsible for administering the games, occupying a prominent year-round governmental office. The games were dedicated to the Greek sea god, Poseidon, and featured oratory, music, and drama, as well as athletic contests. A dramatic theater as well as a 20,000 seat stadium were used for these events.

Corinth's eclecticism revealed itself in an array of religious choices established by its multicultural inhabitants. Egyptians promoted the cults of Isis and Osiris. Isis was worshiped as a god for sailors because the myth tells of her enduring search on the seas for her betrayed and lost husband Osiris. Osiris is a god of afterlife, who after his death was resurrected to become head of the underworld.

Greeks and Romans honored Poseidon, god of the sea; Athena, goddess of war, the sea, cities and the arts; Aphrodite, goddess of

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<sup>7</sup>Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 18; Wiseman, *Land*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>8</sup>Wiseman, "Corinth and Rome," pp. 501-502.

love and fertility; Apollo, god of prophecy; Asklepios, god of healing; and emperors beginning with Julius Caesar. Prominent temples and statues are dedicated to all of these. Apollos often features prominently in colonized cities as an ode of good fortune. His famous Delphic oracle is only some 30 miles from Corinth. The much publicized report that Old Corinth's temple to Aphrodite housed over 1,000 sacred prostitutes is regarded as Athenian slander and is not so certain to still be functioning this way in Paul's day, although this does not mean to imply that Corinth was any more sexually pristine than any other seaport.<sup>9</sup>

One of the busiest religious centers in Paul's day was the Asklepium. Comparable to a modern-day health club, people came here to bathe in its fountain, sleep (healing in their dreams), exercise, read, and dine (on sacrificial meat, cf. 1 Cor 8:10; 10:21). Replicas of body parts found in excavations were offered to the Asklepios by thankful beneficiaries of his healing.<sup>10</sup>

Though not a god, Sisyphus, was considered one of the founding kings of ancient Corinth. Noted for his craftiness, in Greek mythology he was banished to Hades with the everlasting task of pushing a rock up a hill only to have it slip back down. For the Corinthian in Paul's day, he stands for successful cunning in business, but behind the temporary luster, perhaps, he signifies the emptiness of life's ambitions that lurked in the background of people's thoughts.<sup>11</sup>

Judaism came with the early Jewish colonists and seems to have thrived. A dynamic synagogue certainly was functioning when Paul arrived, according to Acts 18:4-17. Also, a building inscription reading "Synagogue of the Hebrews" has been found by archaeologists along the Lechaem road. Although the inscription is somewhat later than Paul's day, its location in the city center suggests the

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<sup>9</sup>Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "The Corinth That Saint Paul Saw," *BA* (1984): 152. Witherington (*Conflict and Community*, p. 14) suggests that both Murphy-O'Connor and Engels (*Roman Corinth*, p. 217) have softened Corinth's reputation for sexual promiscuity, perhaps in overreaction to the broad, unsophisticated caricature of Corinth drawn by earlier NT scholars.

<sup>10</sup>See R.E. Oster, "Use, Misuse, and Neglect of Archaeological Evidence in Some Modern Works on 1 Corinthians," *ZNW* 83 (1992): 52-73.

<sup>11</sup>Murphy-O'Connor, "Corinth," p. 152.

prominence of Judaism from the early days of New Corinth. Significant increases to the Jewish population likely occurred in A.D. 19 and in the late 40s when Tiberius and then Claudius expelled Jews from Rome. According to Acts 18:2, the latter purge is what brought Aquila and Priscilla and their tentmaking business to Corinth for the eighteen months Paul evangelized there. As Acts 18:8,17 indicate, the Jewish community probably had a certain amount of freedom to manage its own affairs and to appoint its own officials.<sup>12</sup>

Due to Roman influence, Corinthians banded together into self-governing clubs and societies of 10 to 15 people which met in homes around the city. These clubs were delineated by individual trades or professions. Something like small unions, they provided vital social interaction and shared meals but even underwrote members' burial expenses from their kitty of dues. Although each had its sponsoring god, they were not religious in nature.

Most likely, the Corinthian church of Paul's day took on the pattern of these clubs as they met in various homes throughout the city. This helps explain the household factions decried in 1 Cor 1:10-12 and even the food-related problems of 1 Corinthians 8 and 11:17-34.

Corinth in the time of Paul was a city of wealth and prosperity.<sup>13</sup> The families who had come a generation or two previously had worked hard. They had carved out successful lives by their own sweat and ingenuity.<sup>14</sup> Like American immigrants, they were proud of their accomplishments, which they demonstrated in their proliferation of self-commending inscriptions around the city. But like the grandchildren of immigrants today, the Corinthians of Paul's day were noted for their superficial materialism and moral perversity.<sup>15</sup> Such traits are epitomized by the fact that before the century was over, Corinth would become the first Greek city in the Roman Empire to hold bloodthirsty gladiatorial shows.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>E.M. Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), p. 225.

<sup>13</sup>Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.20, 8.6.23.

<sup>14</sup>Murphy-O'Connor, "Corinth," p. 148.

<sup>15</sup>Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1984), p. 13.

<sup>16</sup>Dio Chrysostom 31.121.

## PAUL AND THE CORINTHIANS

Paul's rocky, seven-year relationship with the Corinthians begins in the fall of A.D. 50 as he enters Corinth on what becomes the last stop of his second missionary journey.<sup>17</sup> Already on the road for a year, he had established churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens, despite opposition from Gentiles, Jews, and intellectuals (Acts 16–17). As Acts 18 describes, he enters the din of Corinth alone but is quickly befriended by Aquila and Priscilla, who were probably already Christians when they came to Corinth from Rome. For eighteen months the three of them lived, worked, and spread the gospel together there, eventually joined by Silas and Timothy.<sup>18</sup>

At first, Paul shared the gospel and fielded questions in the Jewish synagogue. It wasn't too long, however, before stiff opposition to his presence arose, and he was ejected. However, he took with him many new Christians from among the God-fearing Gentiles who attended the synagogue, as well as Jews including the head of the synagogue, Crispus. Boldly, they set up shop for the first church right next door in the home of Titius Justus. Presumably, they continued to meet there and in other homes around the city for the next eighteen months, since God had instructed Paul to remain in Corinth despite the risks of conflict.

Sparks did fly, and at one point the Jews pressed charges against Paul for breaking Jewish law before Gallio, the Roman proconsul. Quite rightly, Gallio rebuffed the Jewish accusations as being outside any Roman concern. Although this may seem like a relatively minor incident in the life of Paul, the mention of Gallio in Acts 18:14 emerges as the single most important event enabling us to date Paul's life with accuracy. The reason for this is that archaeologists have discovered a datable inscription about a boundary dispute from

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<sup>17</sup>L.C.A. Alexander, "Chronology of Paul," *DPL*, pp. 115-123.

<sup>18</sup>Ronald F. Hock ("The Workshop as a Social Setting for Paul's Missionary Preaching," *CBQ* 41 [1979]: 438-450) suggests that Paul very well may have used his tentmaking workshop in the marketplace as a location for discussing the gospel with those interested. To do so would have followed a Greek precedent set by Socrates, as early as the fifth century B.C. He probably did this not only in Corinth but in most of the other cities he traveled to, including Ephesus, Thessalonica, and Rome.

Emperor Claudius to Gallio which places Gallio's one-year term between A.D. 51 and 52.<sup>19</sup> Anchored by Paul's encounter with Gallio being A.D. 51, the rest of Paul's life can be dated backward and forward from time periods provided in the Acts and his letters.<sup>20</sup>

Upon leaving Corinth, Paul sailed to Syria, probably Antioch, before quickly setting out over land to revisit the previously established churches in Asia Minor and then settling in Ephesus for three years. While in Ephesus, he sent the Corinthians three letters and slipped across the Aegean Sea in a vessel for a brief, surprise visit.

The first letter, commonly known as the "previous letter," is mentioned in 1 Cor 5:9-11. Given the wild immorality of Corinth, it is not surprising that Paul emphasized separation from such people in this letter. However, it has never been found, although a few scholars believe 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 may have originally been part of it.

Next, Paul received a letter from the Corinthians asking various specific questions about Christian life and practice. He is also informed verbally from members of Chloe's household (1 Cor 1:11) about the factionalism that is hurting the church's witness. He responded with the letter we know of as 1 Corinthians. During this period, Timothy was dispatched to Corinth for a brief time (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10) as Paul's personal ambassador, perhaps to give further voice to Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians or to other issues Paul anticipated. We have no indication as to how long Timothy stayed.

Paul's brief trip to Corinth in A.D. 54 and the letter on its heels upon his return are chief events which underlie Paul's writing of 2 Corinthians in A.D. 56. We don't know why Paul went. Maybe Timothy reported that Paul's personal presence was needed. Possibly, conservative agitators had followed Paul to Corinth as they previously had to Galatia and were stirring up trouble, causing the Corinthians to second-guess Paul's credibility (2 Cor 11:13).<sup>21</sup> What

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<sup>19</sup>Murphy-O'Connor, "Corinth," p. 148; Murphy-O'Connor, *Corinth*, pp. 130-140. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Paul and Gallio," *JBL* 112 (1993): 315-317.

<sup>20</sup>See Alexander, "Chronology of Paul," pp. 115-123.

<sup>21</sup>Most scholars today prefer to leave the evidence in 2 Cor 10-13 to a later period of trouble, viewing it as part of a fifth letter from Paul. However, the case for the unity of the letter still has its merits as will be shown in a later discussion.



we do know is that this trip, usually described as “the painful visit” (2 Cor 2:1), was a complete disaster. Paul left angry and humiliated. Apparently, he confronted the ringleader of the trouble (perhaps someone in the church who had been influenced by the outsiders) face to face but when the man insulted him, no one in the church came to Paul’s defense.<sup>22</sup>

Speculation regarding the accusations hurled at Paul include the illegitimacy of his authority over the Corinthians and his misuse of funds collected for the Jerusalem offering (1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 7:2; 8:11).<sup>23</sup> This was not a theological issue so much as one of personal integrity. Paul speaks of his being hurt emotionally most by the fact that the church did not side with him (2 Cor 2:5-11).

Upon his return, Paul wrote a third letter to the Corinthians, “the severe letter” (2 Cor 2:4; 7:8). Although not existing today, as described in 2 Cor 2:4-11 and 7:5-13, it was undoubtedly the most emotional and strident of any of Paul’s letters. Apparently, he unleashed his anger and disappointment, scolding the church for not supporting him and demanding that the majority of the church take charge and discipline the offender as well as apologize to him. The letter is so harsh that Paul seems genuinely afraid (“fears within” – 2 Cor 7:5) that it will drive the church farther away from him and from Christ. But he sees no choice; this situation can’t be left like it is.

Titus received the formidable task of delivering this explosive letter into the charged atmosphere of the Corinthian church and carrying out its demands. Paul’s anxieties over Titus’s success seem to overwhelm him as he waits for news. Apparently, the arrangements with Titus were that they would meet in Troas after a set

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<sup>22</sup>Colin Kruse (2 *Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987]) attempts to show that the person involved in this conflict is the same as the disciplined man in 1 Cor 5. However, this remains highly unlikely. See also Kruse, “The Offender and the Offense in 2 Corinthians 2:5 and 7:12,” *EvQ* 60 (1988): 129-139.

<sup>23</sup>Margaret E. Thrall (*A Critical & Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, ICC [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994], pp. 61-69) makes a good point of demonstrating this although she presses the point too far. See also Thrall, “The Offender and the Offense: A Problem of Detection in 2 Corinthians,” in *Scripture: Meaning and Method*, ed. B. Thompson (Hull: Hull University, 1987): 65-78.

period of time, maybe as long as six months. Second Corinthians 2:12 tells us that Paul went by land up to Troas, probably in A.D. 55 but was crushed to find Titus was not there. Remaining for some time evangelizing, maybe a month or so, he crossed over to Macedonia, probably Philippi, desperate to find Titus there. Finally, Titus arrived with the great news that the Corinthians – or most of them – were back in the fold. Genuinely remorseful over their hurtful behavior toward Paul, they had, indeed, dealt with the offender and expressed their renewed devotion to him (2 Cor 7:7,11,12).<sup>24</sup>

The letter we call 2 Corinthians historically comes as Paul's fourth letter to Corinth. Buoyed by Titus's positive report, Paul writes this highly emotional letter, sending it back with Titus (2 Cor 7:17), probably A.D. 56. The letter interacts over and over with the events of the Painful Visit and the Severe Letter. Paul gushes with joy over the Corinthians' response (2 Cor 7:7,13-16), even recommending that they lift the punishment on the person who offended him (2 Cor 2:7). However, the tone of the letter is extremely defensive as Paul squirms under pressure from the Corinthians (most likely as advised by Titus) to toot his own horn regarding his own apostolic credentials. Out of his love for them, but against his own convictions against boasting, he is willing to explain the superiority of his apostleship in terms the Corinthians seem to require. These terms – such as providing letters of recommendation (2 Cor 3:1) and lists of accomplishments (2 Cor 6:3-13; 11:16-12:10) – Paul regards as superficial and unnecessary (2 Cor 3:2-3; 10:7) and probably reflect the influence of the conservative agitators upon the Corinthians. Paul seems to know he must respond, however uncomfortable it is for him, in order to block any further inroads from these outsiders and thus reinforce his renewed relationship with the Corinthians.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Remembering that the Corinthian church consisted of numerous independent house groups, it is highly likely that a majority (2 Cor 2:6) have pledged their allegiance to Paul. Given the harshness of 2 Cor 10-13 toward the influence of outsiders, a minority of the households may still, in fact, have moved away from Paul, or are, at least, highly vulnerable to anti-Paul influence.

<sup>25</sup>A considerable number of scholars, including Kruse (2 *Corinthians*, p. 24) and Ralph P. Martin (2 *Corinthians*, Word Bible Commentary [Waco: Word, 1986], p. xxxiv) posit an interim visit of Titus between Paul's writing of 2 Cor 1-9 and 10-13 at which time he finds the Corinthian church in

Titus brought 2 Corinthians to Corinth armed with Paul's commendation within the letter to spur the church to complete its collection of the offering for the Jerusalem Christians (1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8:10-24). Paul followed a few months later (2 Cor 12:14; Acts 20:3) and remained in Corinth three months. During this period, he wrote Romans, but we know nothing of his interaction with the Corinthian church. Presumably, he finalized the Corinthian offering, but he must have worked diligently to solidify this troubled church and contend personally with the outside agitators and their remaining pockets of influence. At any rate, once the various representatives from the Greek and Asian churches arrived in Corinth with their offerings (Acts 20:1-6), he tried to set sail with them to Syria but, discovering treachery from the Jewish community in Corinth, he and the others traveled first to Troas, and, then, set sail from there.

We have no certainty of further communication or visitation between Paul and the Corinthian church after this. Possibly, following release from his first Roman imprisonment, he returned to Corinth and other churches in Greece and Asia Minor, as the Pastoral epistles suggest (1 Tim. 1:3; 2 Tim. 4:20).

## THE UNITY OF 2 CORINTHIANS

One may rightly comment that the literary unity of 2 Corinthians "cannot just be presupposed."<sup>26</sup> Analyses which question whether various sections of 2 Corinthians are original to it have come long and hard during the past two centuries of critical scholarship. Second Corinthians's sharp shifts in content and uneven tone make it the most susceptible of all the NT books to patchwork theories despite the fact that none of the Greek manuscripts (dating back to the third century) give the slightest hint that 2 Corinthians

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shambles again due to outside influences. His report back to Paul, precipitates what we have in 10-13 which is delivered separately. Although the change of Paul's tone between the end of chapter nine and the beginning of chapter ten is notable, it does not demand such a reconstruction, as will be discussed latter.

<sup>26</sup>Furnish, *II Corinthians*, p. 34.

was ever anything different than what we read today.<sup>27</sup> Although the ebb and flow of research has sidelined many conjectures, questions still remain regarding some parts of 2 Corinthians. As many as nine sections of 2 Corinthians have been scrutinized.<sup>28</sup> However, just five will be discussed here.<sup>29</sup>

First, 2 Cor 2:14–7:4 has been noted as at one time existing separately from 2 Corinthians.<sup>30</sup> Even a casual reader is jolted at the jump between the travelogue commentary in 2:12–13 and the military parade description of the gospel in 2:13–17 which opens a five-chapter philosophy of apostolic ministry. It is all the more noticeable when, beginning at 7:5, the travelogue picks up again and continues on until 7:16. However, upon closer perusal, scholars are increasingly reluctant to name this as part of a separate letter. Despite the abruptness between 2:13 and 2:14, the theme of human weakness and divine power in 2:12–17 connects to 1:8–10, and the theme of divine ownership connects 1:22 and 2:14. Despite the change of subject between 7:4 and 7:5, the verbal links supplied by “encouragement” (7:4,13), “joy” (7:4,7) and “troubles” (7:4,5) supply sturdy connections.<sup>31</sup> Besides, the efforts to postulate yet another

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<sup>27</sup>William S. Kurz (“2 Corinthians: Implied Readers and Canonical Implications,” *JNT* 62 [1996]: 43–63) astutely observes that composite theories seldom grapple with the task of reading the theoretical sections as being directed to different social contexts and situations from the letter as a whole.

<sup>28</sup>W. Schmithals, “Die Korintherbrief als Briefsammlung,” *ZNW* 64 (1973): 263–288.

<sup>29</sup>The most exhaustive discussion of these sections is in Thrall, *Second Epistle*, pp. 3–49. They are the focus of discussion both for those arguing for unity, such as A.M.G. Stephenson, “A Defence of the Integrity of 2 Corinthians,” in *The Authorship and Integrity of the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1965), pp. 82–97; and W.H. Bates, “The Integrity of II Corinthians,” *NTS* 12 (1965): 56–69; as well as those arguing against unity, such as N.H. Taylor, “The Composition and Chronology of Second Corinthians,” *JNT* 44 (1991): 67–87.

<sup>30</sup>W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians*, J.E. Steeley, trans. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), pp. 94–95.

<sup>31</sup>Murray J. Harris, “2 Corinthians,” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), p. 303; Martin, *2 Corinthians*, p. xliii; Margaret Thrall, “A Second Thanksgiving Period in 2 Corinthians,” *JNT* 16 (1982): 109.

letter between 1 and 2 Corinthians or to connect this to the Severe Letter are unwarranted.<sup>32</sup> More recent efforts to analyze 2 Corinthians 1–7 through the eyes of Roman rhetoric as well as chiasmic structure loudly confirm separation of 2:14–7:4 as ill-conceived.<sup>33</sup> Certainly, it is a digression but not without purpose and point to the context as a whole.

Second, perhaps less obvious to the casual reader because it is such a short section is 2 Cor 6:14–7:1. Here, again, though, the careful reader observes an interruption between 6:13 (“Open wide your hearts also”) and 7:2 (“Make room for us in your hearts”). Scholarly analysis of these six verses suggests that not only are they out of place, they don’t sound like Paul, using six words he never uses elsewhere in his writings nor used by anyone else in the NT (*hapax legomenae*).<sup>34</sup> Is this a snippet of something someone else said or wrote that Paul has adapted into his material, or is it something Paul wrote or spoke at another time and place that he decides to use here?

Despite some of the unusual language, Pauline themes do appear here: the church as the temple of God, the polarization of righteousness and unrighteousness as well as between light and dark.<sup>35</sup> Also, plenty of characteristic Pauline language occurs: “living God” (2 Cor 3:3; 1 Thess 1:9), “unbeliever” (twelve other occurrences in 1 and 2 Cor), and “holiness” (Rom 1:4; 1 Thess 3:13). Although conclusions vary,<sup>36</sup> many today incline toward this section being from Paul.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Furnish, *II Corinthians*, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup>David A DeSilva, “Meeting the Exigency of a Complex Rhetorical Situation: Paul’s Strategy in 2 Corinthians 1 through 7,” *AUSS* 34 (1996) 5–22; DeSilva, “Measuring Penultimate against Ultimate Reality: An Investigation of the Integrity and Argumentation of 2 Corinthians,” *JSNT* 52 (1993): 41–70; Craig Blomberg, “The Structure of 2 Corinthians 1–7,” *Criswell Theological Review* 4 (1,1989): 3–20; Linda Belleville, “A Letter of Apologetic Self-Commendation: 2 Cor 1:8–7:16,” *NovT* 31 (1989): 142–163.

<sup>34</sup>Martin, *2 Corinthians*, p. xlv.

<sup>35</sup>Martin, *2 Corinthians*, p. xlv; Gordon Fee, “2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 and Food Offered to Idols,” *NTS* 23 (1977): 140–161.

<sup>36</sup>Furnish, *II Corinthians*, p. 35.

<sup>37</sup>Thrall, *Second Epistle*, p. 35; Martin, *2 Corinthians*, p. xlv; Harris, “2 Corinthians,” p. 303; Danker, *II Corinthians*, Augsburg Commentary on

Eyeing the language of separation from unrighteousness, some have been tempted to conclude that 6:14–7:1 is part of the “previous” letter mentioned in 1 Cor 5:9.<sup>38</sup> However, the point is explicitly different. Paul emphasizes that in the previous letter he urged separation from the immorality of believers not dissociation from unbelievers as emphasized in 6:14–7:1.<sup>39</sup>

Most likely, then, Paul himself has inserted this pre-formed, self-contained unit of material from previous teaching, either oral or written, perhaps influenced by others. Interesting comparisons to Qumran materials<sup>40</sup> as well as writings of Philo<sup>41</sup> have been made. The placement exactly here in 2 Corinthians is so awkward as to be unlikely to come from anyone other than Paul.<sup>42</sup> However, two points should be kept in mind. One is that Paul dictated this letter as he did all his letters. This fact enhances the potential for distraction, interruption, and loose digressions such as this. A second point is that although the section’s relationship to the immediately previous verses is not obvious,<sup>43</sup> as one backs up to 6:1 and reads of Paul’s concern about receiving “God’s grace in vain” or to 5:19 to see Paul’s emphasis on people “no longer living for themselves but for

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the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), p. 18; Jerome Murphy-O’Conner, “2 Cor 6:14–7:1: Solution Proposed,” *NTS* 33 (2, 1987): 273–275.

<sup>38</sup>John Hurd, *The Origin of I Corinthians* (New York: Seabury, 1965), pp. 235–237.

<sup>39</sup>Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, p. 39.

<sup>40</sup>Joseph Fitzmyer, “Qumran and the Interpolated Paragraph in 2 Cor 6:14–7:1,” *CBQ* 23 (1961): 271–278; Margaret Thrall, “The Problem of II Cor. VI.14–VII.1 in Some Recent Discussion,” *NTS* 24 (1978): 136–137; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, p. 377.

<sup>41</sup>Jerome Murphy-O’Conner, “Philo and 2 Cor 6:14–7:1,” *RB* 95 (1988): 55–69.

<sup>42</sup>Thrall, “II Cor VI.14–VIII.1,” p. 139. Paul Brooks Duff (“2 Corinthians 1–7: Sidestepping the Division Hypothesis Dilemma,” *BTB* 24 [1, 1994]: 16–26) attempts to counter this argument by postulating that it fits as a “herald’s cry.” However, such attempts to understand the placement of 6:14–7:2 argue as much for Paul putting it there as against this.

<sup>43</sup>However, Nils Dahl (“A Fragment and Its Context: 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1,” in *Studies in Paul* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977], pp. 62–69) does suggest that Paul’s point is that just as no accord exists between light and dark, Christ and Belial, so also should there be no accord between those believers who “widen their hearts” to Paul and those unbelievers who do not.

him who died for them,” Paul’s emphasis on separation and holiness in 6:14–7:1 fits well.

Probably inconceivable to the casual reader is the suggestion that 2 Corinthians 8 and 2 Corinthians 9 both were not originally part of 2 Corinthians. Arguments regarding 2 Corinthians 8 – repetition of information about Titus (7:13-15; 8:16-17), presumption of knowledge about the two brothers coming with him (8:18,22), or even evidence that 2 Corinthians 8 as well as 2 Corinthians 9 are formal business letters<sup>44</sup> – do not convince many.<sup>45</sup> Arguments regarding 2 Corinthians 9, first proposed by Semler 200 years ago,<sup>46</sup> that 2 Corinthians 9 was originally a letter sent to Christians outside Corinth, are more formidable, and give scholars more pause.

What pulls them up short is the language Paul uses to refer to the collection (“service”) in 9:1, which, in Greek, reads like a first mention of the collection.<sup>47</sup> In addition to that, the regional reference to Achaia in 9:2 and the repetition of information from chapter 8 in chapter 9 regarding the collection give added support to the idea of chapter 9 being originally independent.

On the other side of the question is the fact that Paul’s reference to the collection in 9:1 is modified by *μὲν γὰρ* (*men gar*, “and for”) which suggests a resumption of a previous subject perhaps after a brief pause in dictation.<sup>48</sup> The repetition of details regarding the

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<sup>44</sup>H. Hagge, “Die beiden uberlieferten sendschreibendes Apostels Paulus an die Gemeinde zu Korinth,” *Jahrbucher für protestantische Theologie* 2 (1876), pp. 481-531; Johannes Weiss, *Earliest Christianity*, F.C. Grant, trans. (New York: Harper, 1959), p. 353; Hans Dieter Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9: A Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

<sup>45</sup>Thrall, *Second Epistle*, p. 37; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, p. 36; Danker, *II Corinthians*, p. 19; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, p. 330.

<sup>46</sup>Johann Semler, *Paraphrasis II epistolae ad Corinthios* (Halle, 1776).

<sup>47</sup>Thrall, *Second Epistle*, p. 42; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, pp. 36, 429. Rather than using a demonstrative pronoun, “this” (ταύτης) in 9:1 as he has in every reference to the collection after 8:4 (8:6,7,19,20) and after 9:1 (9:5,12,13), he has modified it merely with an article, “the.” These subtle distinctions in the text are not observable in English translations like NIV or even NASB which translate 9:1 with a demonstrative despite its absence.

<sup>48</sup>Furnish, *II Corinthians*, p. 429. In addition, Stanley Stowers (“*Peri Men Gar* and the Integrity of 2 Cor 8 and 9,” *NovT* 32 [1990]: 340-348) ably discredits the demand by Betz (*Administrative Letters*, pp. 5, 27, 90) that the

collection is probably emphatic, and the regional reference to Achaia seems unlikely to exclude Corinth. Tipping the scale against an independent chapter 9, as noted by Furnish, are two references in chapter 9 which presume information from chapter 8: the mention of the brothers (9:3; 8:18) and the emphasis on their completing the collection (9:4-5; 8:7-15).<sup>49</sup>

Admittedly, this is a close call. However, the evidence does not demand that chapters 8 and 9 are two separate letters about the collection, one to Corinth, and one to Achaia. Rather, these are interdependent chapters in 2 Corinthians, chapter 8 dealing with the details of the collection project and chapter 9 emphasizing motivation for the project, as noted by Danker.<sup>50</sup>

Fourth, without a doubt the most serious challenge to the unity of 2 Corinthians comes from chapters 10–13. As long ago as 1870, Hausrath broadcast his belief that in these chapters, he had discovered the missing “severe” letter to the Corinthians.<sup>51</sup> No doubt, in chapters 10–13 Paul erupts into harsh tones of anger and disappointment which seem to undercut completely the exuberance and joy which he builds up to by chapters 7, 8, and 9.

But Hausrath looked closer and pointed to evidence that chapters 10–13 were written previous to chapters 1–9. Particularly he saw passages in chapters 1–9 written in the past tense which appear to allude to passages from chapters 10–13 written in future tenses, such as 1:23 which says that Paul “did not return” to them in order to spare them, corresponding to 13:2 in which Paul asserts that he “will not return” in order to spare them or when Paul says in 2:3-4 that he “wrote” them out of great distress and in 13:10 when he says

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περί μὲν γὰρ which opens 2 Corinthians 9 should be taken as opening the body of a new letter. Stowers examines evidence from the only other use of the phrase in the NT, Acts 28:22, plus 90 other uses outside the NT to conclude that *peri men de* introduces a subtopic to what has preceded, such as a reason or an explanation for what was previously stated. This fits admirably with what Paul is doing in 2 Corinthians 9 in relationship to 2 Corinthians 8.

<sup>49</sup>Furnish, *II Corinthians*, p. 432.

<sup>50</sup>Danker, *II Corinthians*, p. 19.

<sup>51</sup>Adolf Hausrath, *Der Vier-Capitalbrief des Paulus an die Korinther* (Heidelberg: Bassermann, 1870).



“I write” so that I may not have to be harsh.<sup>52</sup> Hausrath also contends that Paul’s reference to Rome (west of Corinth) as “regions beyond you” in 2 Cor 10:16 makes much better sense if he is in Ephesus (east of Corinth), where he wrote the Severe Letter, rather than Macedonia (north of Corinth), where he wrote 2 Corinthians.

Criticism against Hausrath’s identification of 2 Cor 10–13 with the “severe” letter has withered its persuasiveness among scholars.<sup>53</sup> Primarily, chapters 10–13 do not contain something we know specifically was in the Severe Letter: Paul’s demand that an individual who offended him be punished (2:5-6; 7:12). Also, chapters 10–13 promise a visit (12:14; 13:1), but the Severe Letter was sent in place of a Painful Visit (1:23; 2:1). Regarding “regions beyond you,” the language need not be taken so literally and the Macedonian region should be recognized as much more culturally distinct from Achaia than it looks like on a map.

More appealing to scholars of all stripes, including many conservatives, is to view 2 Cor 10–13 as a separate, fifth letter, written after Titus returns with new, bad news after delivering 2 Corinthians 1–9.<sup>54</sup> This position still takes into account Hausrath’s future tense passages. It helps make sense of 2 Cor 12:18 which refers to Titus’s visit in the past tense when it was in the planning stage in 2 Corinthians 7–9. Also, it explains the increased strident tones of chapters 10–13 as Paul’s response to new, outside influences claiming some kind of rival apostolic authority to Paul’s (11:13; 12:11) rather than to internal problems which seem to be his concern in chapters 1–9.

This way of viewing chapters 10–13 is attractive but is not demanded by the evidence. As Witherington points out, the past

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<sup>52</sup>See also the similar relationships of 2 Cor 2:9 to 10:6, 4:2 to 12:16 and 7:2 to 12:17.

<sup>53</sup>Harris (“2 Corinthians,” pp. 304-305) contains an excellent summary of these arguments. Other helpful articles are Jerome Murphy-O’Conner, “The Date of 2 Corinthians 10–13,” *AusBR* 39 (1991): 31-43; and Richard Batey, “Paul’s Interaction with the Corinthians,” *JBL* 84 (1965): 139-146. However, Francis Watson (“2 Cor. X–XIII and Paul’s Painful Letter to the Corinthians,” *JTS* 35 [1984]: 324-346) has attempted to revive Hausrath’s thesis somewhat by delving deeper into 2 Corinthians as a whole.

<sup>54</sup>Furnish, *II Corinthians*, p. 36; Thrall, *Second Epistle*, p. 20; Martin, *2 Corinthians*, p. xlv; Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, p. 34.

(aorist) tenses describing Titus's visit in 12:17-18 need not be real.<sup>55</sup> Especially as Paul reaches the end of the book, they could well be epistolary (spoken from the standpoint of the audience reading the letter). The mention of the unnamed brother traveling with Titus does correspond with 2 Cor 8:18,22. Reading 12:17-18 this way opens up the very real possibility that Paul could have received new information about problems in Corinth before sending 2 Corinthians but after writing chapters 1-9. This could explain the gulf between chapters 10-13 as well as an entirely separate letter.

Other ways which account for the change of tone in chapter 10-13 have to do with how one reads the letter. Perhaps chapters 1-9 are directed to the majority of the church which has fallen into line with Paul after the Painful Visit, the Severe Letter, and Titus's hard work while chapters 10-13 are to the minority who are still under the sway of outside opposition to Paul.<sup>56</sup> After all, 2 Cor 2:6 does speak of "the majority" which imposed discipline upon the offender named in the Severe Letter.

Perhaps, as a growing group of scholars are showing, Paul's heightened criticism of the Corinthians in chapters 10-13 concludes a calculated rhetorical plan employing counterattack (*synkrisis*) or strong emotional appeal (*peroratio*) to win his defense against the charges being leveled at him by the Corinthians.<sup>57</sup> One must admit that Paul never relaxes from a defensive posture in 2 Corinthians from the beginning to the end. While Paul's harsh tones in chapters 10-13 following the lead up in chapters 7, 8, and 9 may seem abrupt, his concerns from early in the letter haven't really changed, just his emotionalism.<sup>58</sup> The issue of his character raised in chapter

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<sup>55</sup>Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, p. 332.

<sup>56</sup>James M. Scott, *2 Corinthians*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), p. 3.

<sup>57</sup>Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, p. 338; F. Young and D.F. Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 27-59; J.T. Fitzgerald, "Paul, the Ancient Epistolary Theorists, and 2 Corinthians 10-13," in *Greeks, Romans, and Corinthians*, ed. D. Balch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990), p. 200. J.A. Loubser, "A New Look at Paradox and Irony in 2 Corinthians 10-13," *Neot* 26 (1992): 507-521; Simon J. Kistemaker, *II Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997) p. 328.

<sup>58</sup>Jan Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN:

1 and of the legitimacy of his apostleship raised in chapter 3 remain the object of his defense in chapters 10–13.

The correspondence of these issues is enough to suggest that even though outside influence of “false apostles” (11:13) is not named earlier, they influence the minority of the Corinthian church and provide the ammunition against Paul observed in the earlier chapters. Who else would have brandished “letters of recommendation” (3:1)? Their earliest influences could even be in the background of Paul’s problems associated with the Painful Visit.<sup>59</sup>

As evident from 2 Cor 7:8–13, the offending individual merely became the pretext for the whole church failing to rally behind Paul until after the Severe Letter. Although Paul can be ecstatic that most of the church has recommitted themselves to him and to the gospel by the time he writes 2 Corinthians, nevertheless, pockets of opposition likely remain under the growing influence of the outside agitators. With chapters 10–13 Paul intends to level a decisive blow against this opposition not only to bring the remainder of the church back to the true gospel but also to shore up any lingering doubts from those who have pledged their loyalty.

Paul’s transition to chapter 10 indeed is rocky but, as Danker points out, no more so than Phil 3 or Rom 9.<sup>60</sup> In this commentary, therefore, we will treat 2 Corinthians as a unity and will treat chapters 10–13 as primarily aimed at responding to a vocal minority of the church who remain mesmerized by the outsiders’ criticisms of Paul.

## PAUL’S OPPONENTS

Second Corinthians resounds with the echo of outside voices filling the Corinthians’ heads with notions geared to sever their relationship with Paul. Since Paul originally brought the gospel to

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Liturgical Press, 1999), p. 158; C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Harper’s New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 244.

<sup>59</sup>Colin G. Kruse (“The Relationship between the Opposition to Paul Reflected in 2 Corinthians 1–7 and 10–13,” *EvQ* 61 [3, 1989]: 195–202) argues convincingly on this point.

<sup>60</sup>Danker, *II Corinthians*, p. 18.

Corinth and made it possible for people there to be reconciled with God through Christ and begin a vibrant church meeting in homes throughout the city, others have come to Corinth presenting themselves as superior in authority to the apostle Paul himself. Presuming the opponents in 2 Cor 10–13 and 1–9 are the same,<sup>61</sup> they supposedly have letters of authentication from Jerusalem (3:1–3), Paul blasts them as “false apostles” (11:13) and sarcastically as “super apostles” in 12:11.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, they have influenced and confused the Corinthians enough to force Paul to write 2 Corinthians and fill it with self-commendation regarding his integrity and his “superior” apostolic credentials over theirs. He does this because he feels he must in order to win the Corinthians back, but he finds doing so personally disturbing and repugnant.

Whereas Paul finds it difficult to boast about himself, self-commendation seems to be the chief characteristic of these outsiders. Clues from 2 Corinthians indicate that they were proud of their Jewish heritage (11:22), their “Christian” service (11:23), their oratorical skill (11:6), their self-confidence (1:15–17), and their charismatic experiences (12:12). They preached a different gospel than Paul’s (11:4). They also accepted money from the Corinthians, unlike Paul who refused it (12:16).<sup>63</sup> They may have viewed Paul’s effort to collect money from the Corinthians for the Jerusalem Christians as cutting off their own purse strings and threatening their prosperity in Corinth.

Their heated, personalized efforts to undercut Paul sound like Paul’s opposition in Galatians, commonly called Judaizers (Gal

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<sup>61</sup>Dieter Georgi (*The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians*, trans. H. Attridge [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986], pp. 229–319) makes a strong case for this.

<sup>62</sup>Not many are persuaded by C.K. Barrett (*Second Epistle*, pp. 30–31), who believes that “false apostles” refers to Corinthian opposition and “super apostles” refers, like “pillars” in Gal 2:6,9 to the bona fide leaders in Jerusalem. Barrett doubts that Paul would even compare himself to false apostles as he does to the super apostles in 2 Cor 12:11. Margaret Thrall (“Super-Apostles, Servants of Christ, and Servants of Satan,” *JSNT* 6 [1980]: 42–57) goes to the extreme to argue that Paul refers to legitimate Jerusalem apostolic leadership by both super-apostles and false apostles.

<sup>63</sup>Furnish, *II Corinthians*, p. 54; Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, p. 345.

4:17). However, no mention of the law or circumcision in 2 Corinthians clouds this identification and requires that, if these are the same people, they have changed their tune considerably since Galatians.<sup>64</sup> The fact that they tout letters of recommendation — where else but from Jerusalem — makes it difficult to lay aside the picture of a band of renegade, conservative Jewish Christians who first followed Paul to Galatia and now to Corinth with the expressed purpose of replacing Paul's gospel and his authority to represent true Christianity (Gal 1:6-7).

It is going too far to say that their credentials were currently legitimate or that they were actual apostles<sup>65</sup> since Acts 15:24 reports that a faction of Jewish Christians had gone out falsely representing the church to new, Gentile congregations.<sup>66</sup> It is possible, though, that they do have apostolic credentials — perhaps even knew Jesus before his crucifixion — but now are misusing these credentials to subvert Paul's successful mission to Gentiles in Galatia and now also in Corinth and other churches as well.

The picture of these Corinthian opponents as ultraconservative Jewish Christians clashes with a considerable amount of the evidence which points to their Greek or even gnostic origins.<sup>67</sup> Their connection to revelations and wonders, rhetorical skills, "worldly" wisdom, and just their overall egotistical posture must be reckoned with.<sup>68</sup> Undermining at least the gnostic element is the positive use

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<sup>64</sup>Harris, "2 Corinthians," p. 347; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, p. 53; Roy Bowen Ward, "The Opponents of Paul," *ResQ* 10 (1967): 189.

<sup>65</sup>Thrall, "Super-Apostles," p. 46. How to interpret "super-apostles" in 2 Cor 11:5 is a major issue in the discussion. Ralph Martin ("The Opponents of Paul in 2 Corinthians: An Old Issue Revisited," in *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], pp. 279-289) as well as C.K. Barrett ("Paul's Opponents in 2 Corinthians," *NTS* 17 [1971]: 233-254) consider "super-apostles" to refer to the Jerusalem apostles, corresponding to the reference in Gal 2:9 to James, Peter, and John as "reputed to be pillars," rather than to the opposition at Corinth.

<sup>66</sup>Doyle Kee, "Who Were the 'Super-Apostles' of 2 Corinthians 10-13?" *ResQ* 23 (2, 1980): 66; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, p. 50; Scott, *2 Corinthians*, p. 13.

<sup>67</sup>Walther Schmithals (*Gnosticism in Corinth*) determines that this opposition is a Christian outgrowth of Jewish gnosticism.

<sup>68</sup>Kee, "Super-Apostles," pp. 69-70; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, p. 53; Peter Marshall, "Invective: Paul and His Enemies in Corinth," in *Perspectives on*

of “knowledge” in 2 Corinthians.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, a typical result when these ingredients are combined emerges with a conclusion that they were “Hellenistic Jews who were propagating . . . a ‘spiritual gnosticism.’”<sup>70</sup>

However, it seems inconceivable that ultraconservative Jewish Christians coming out of Jerusalem could be pushing a gospel so infiltrated with Greek ideas as to be outside the bounds of Paul’s own radicalized message which had stripped unnecessary Jewish elements. Could these Jewish agitators be so clever as to be able to manipulate the Corinthians against Paul by successfully incorporating elements from Greek culture into their opposition to Paul which they themselves don’t believe? It doesn’t seem likely, but then no identification satisfactorily combines the paradoxical elements of these opponents as currently gleaned from the information we have from 2 Corinthians and the first century.<sup>71</sup> As one commentator astutely points out, any final resolution is also hampered considerably by the fact that 2 Corinthians provides no information about the doctrine or theology of these opponents.<sup>72</sup> Most current discussion recognizes the limitations involved in this discussion and offers no more than conjectures as has been done here.

It’s best, then, to keep in mind the characteristics of Paul’s opponents available from reading 2 Corinthians without any adamant historical identification until better information becomes available. They were Jewish. They were Greek. They considered themselves Christians. They hated Paul. They hurt Paul, and he feared what more they could do. It was up to him to marshal all the strength and the skills he had to prevent them from doing any further damage. They had backed him into a corner, and he responds with ferocity and emotion in 2 Corinthians, compelled out of his deep love for the

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*Language and Text: Essays, and Poems in Honor of Frances Anderson*, Edgar W. Conrad and Edward G. Newing, eds. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), pp. 369-372; Jerry L. Sumney, *Identifying Paul’s Opponents: The Question of Method in 2 Corinthians*, JSNTSupp 40 (University of Sheffield: Sheffield, 1990).

<sup>69</sup>Furnish, *II Corinthians*, p. 53.

<sup>70</sup>Kee, “Super-Apostles,” p. 69.

<sup>71</sup>Danker, *II Corinthians*, p. 25; Sumney, *Paul’s Opponents*, p. 147.

<sup>72</sup>Furnish, *II Corinthians*, p. 53; Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, p. 7.

Corinthians and his commitment to true, saving Christianity and humble, self-sacrificing leadership.

## RELEVANCE

Christians treat 2 Corinthians like the ugly twin sister of 1 Corinthians. First Corinthians's poignant theology about challenging issues attracts everyone's constant attention. Meanwhile, 2 Corinthians sits in the corner waiting for someone to ask it to dance. Yet, once we make some effort to get to know 2 Corinthians, we will be pleasantly surprised.

Today, as in the days of the early church, various outside forces threaten to sever people's loyalty to Christ and cut away at the fabric of the church. It might be a cult like Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses. It might be cultural forces like the challenges of post-modernism or the mind-set of the so-called Generation X which questions absolutes like God and salvation in Christ alone. It might just be an obstinate person who envies the authority of the minister, elders, or deacons and questions their integrity and decision-making at every turn and who draws around him or her an anti-faction.

If you are someone who cares deeply about your local church and would do almost anything to maintain its success and its integrity as a body of Christian believers, then 2 Corinthians will speak to your heart and nourish your soul. You will relate to Paul's agony over this church, feel his compassion, and be engulfed by his intense emotion in this letter. You will take in the principles of genuine church leadership and apply them to your life responsibly to enable you to enrich the quality of your local church.

The comments which follow are intended to help you both to understand 2 Corinthians in its own historical context and to apply its key principles to your own personal context in the church today.

# OUTLINE

- I. OPENING — 1:1-2**
- II. THANKSGIVING — 1:3-11**
  - A. GOD COMFORTS — 1:3-7**
  - B. GOD DELIVERS — 1:8-11**
- III. DEFENSE OF INTEGRITY — 1:12-2:13**
  - A. CLARITY SOUGHT — 1:12-14**
  - B. SECOND TRAVEL ITINERARY EXPLAINED — 1:15-17**
  - C. CANDOR DEMANDED — 1:18-22**
  - D. THIRD TRAVEL ITINERARY DEFENDED — 1:23-2:4**
  - E. THE OFFENDER FORGIVEN — 2:5-11**
  - F. ACTUAL TRAVEL DESCRIBED — 2:12-13**
- IV. DEFENSE OF APOSTOLIC MINISTRY IN PRINCIPLE — 2:14-7:4**
  - A. SUFFICIENT FOR MINISTRY — 2:14-3:6**
    - 1. The Aroma of Christ Spread — 2:14-17
    - 2. A Living Letter of Recommendation Sent — 3:1-3
    - 3. A Personal Reference Provided — 3:4-6
  - B. SUPERIOR TO THE OLD COVENANT — 3:7-18**
    - 1. Glory Unsurpassed 3:7-11
    - 2. Glory Unobstructed 3:12-18
  - C. TENACIOUS DESPITE SHORTCOMINGS — 4:1-5:10**
    - 1. Christ Preached Plainly — 4:1-6
    - 2. Hardships Overcome because of Jesus' Death — 4:7-12
    - 3. Increasing Multitudes Brought to Life — 4:13-15
    - 4. Driven by Unseen, Eternal Reward — 4:16-18
    - 5. Confident in Eternal Home — 5:1-10
      - a. Permanent Home Guaranteed — 5:1-5
      - b. Pleasing the Lord Prioritizes Life — 5:6-10



**D. PREACHING RECONCILIATION THROUGH CHRIST — 5:11-6:2**

1. Motivated by Christ's Love — 5:11-15
2. Christ's Message of Reconciliation Delivered — 5:16-6:2

**E. HARDSHIPS IN MINISTRY — 6:3-10**

**F. AN APPEAL FOR OPENNESS AND RECONCILIATION — 6:11-7:4**

1. Paul's Heart Opened — 6:11-13
2. Holiness Demanded — 6:14-7:1
3. Paul's Trust Expressed — 7:2-4

**V. ENCOURAGING NEWS: RELATIONSHIP FULLY RESTORED — 7:5-16**

**A. TITUS REPORTS LOVE FOR PAUL — 7:5-7**

**B. TRUE REPENTANCE DEMONSTRATES INNOCENCE — 7:8-13a**

**C. TITUS EXPRESSED DEEP AFFECTION — 7:13b-16**

**VI. PREPARATION FOR THE COLLECTION — 8:1-9:15**

**A. INCENTIVES TOWARD GENEROSITY — 8:1-15**

1. Excel Like the Macedonians — 8:1-7
2. Give Like Christ — 8:8-9
3. Complete Your Offering — 8:10-12
4. Achieve Equity — 8:13-15

**B. TITUS PLUS TWO OTHERS SENT TO CORINTH TO HELP — 8:16-9:5**

1. Criticism to Be Thwarted — 8:16-21
2. Measure Up to Expectations — 8:22-24
3. Follow Through on What Was Begun — 9:1-5

**C. MORE INCENTIVE TO BE GENEROUS — 9:6-15**

1. God Will Be Generous — 9:6-11
2. God Will Be Praised — 9:12-15

**VII. FINAL DEFENSE OF MINISTRY — 10:1-13:10**

**A. LAUNCH OF A MASSIVE COUNTERATTACK — 10:1-18**

1. Powerful Weapons Employed — 10:1-6
2. Forceful Personal Presence Warned — 10:7-10
3. God's Expansion of the Gospel Boasted — 10:12-18

**B. COMPARISON TO FALSE APOSTLES MADE — 11:1-15**

1. True Message of Jesus Preached — 11:1-6

- 2. No Money Accepted – 11:7-12
- 3. The False Apostles Serve Satan – 11:13-15
- C. BOASTING AS A “FOOL” – 11:16-33**
  - 1. Rationale Provided – 11:16-21a
  - 2. Ancestry and Hardships Listed – 11:21b-29
  - 3. Weakness Boasted – 11:30-33
- D. MORE BOASTING – 12:1-10**
  - 1. A Vision Divulged – 12:1-6
  - 2. An Irremovable Thorn Remains – 12:7-10
- E. “BOASTING” RETROSPECTIVE – 12:11-13**
- F. PREPARATION FOR THE THIRD VISIT – 12:14–13:10**
  - 1. No Exploitation Tactics Employed – 12:14-18
  - 2. More Trouble Feared – 12:19-21
  - 3. Harsh Treatment for Sinners Warned – 13:1-4
  - 4. Faith-testing Evidences Paul’s Strength – 13:5-10
- VIII. CLOSING REMARKS – 13:11-14**