

2 CORINTHIANS INTRODUCTION

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (12:9)
To a large degree, with the exception of a few passages frequently quoted (2 Cor 4:7, 5:17, and 12:9), most of 2 Cor is a book neglected by many Christians. Part of the problem is its older, bigger brother, overshadows it. Michael Gorman calls it “the sleeper” among Paul’s letters, perhaps even better, a “sleeping giant” (*Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, 287). This letter offers many hidden surprises. To begin, this letter provides us with some of the most revealing insights into the daring and determined Jew from Tarsus, Protestant’s patron saint. We learn more about a person when they are in conflict situations than any other time. 2 Corinthians was most certainly a letter written with an achy heart as a result of severe conflict. Paul feared false apostles who were preaching a false gospel were ripping this church he started away from him. The Corinthians were replacing the message of the cross with a pleasing message of success and glory. In reading Paul’s response, the reader is forced to answer three important questions:

- (1) What are the traits of an authentic apostle?
- (2) What are the traits of an authentic gospel?
- (3) What are the traits of an authentic church?

It is hard to imagine a timelier letter for the church today. In short, “Paul bears his soul and the soul of the gospel” (Gorman, 287). All of this was not simply to vent, but to bring about reconciliation between Paul and his church, and ultimately, between them and God.

BACKGROUND

I. Authorship and Date: The Apostle Paul in A.D. 56 from Macedonia.

II. The City of Corinth

Located about forty miles South of Athens on a narrow isthmus linking mainland Greece and its southern territory, the Roman colony Corinth served as the capital of Achaia. Corinth was “the master of two harbors” (Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.20); Lechaion served ships traveling the Adriatic Sea and Cenchreae leading to the Aegean. The Diolkos Road, a dry canal that allowed ships to be hoisted on wheeled wagons and rolled, connected the two ports. Seafarers preferred the route through Corinth in order to avoid the treacherous waters to the south of Greece, a route that in addition to the danger added six days to the journey. All of this meant that Corinth served as a strategic travel hub. Travelers from all over the Roman world passed through, and along with them came a plethora of worldviews leading to moral chaos.

Once a dynamic city, Corinth was destroyed by Rome in 146 B.C. and left inactive until 44 B.C. when Julius Caesar reestablished it and settled it with freed slaves, poor folks, and others considered non-elites at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. In addition to Corinth’s famous past, it also had an infamous reputation for depravity and moral corruption. The phrase “to become Corinthianized” meant to become immoral and corrupt. Imagine a modern city so depraved that it was called “Sin City.” (Oh wait, we actually have one of those in Nevada). Corinth was known for its thriving sex trade and prostitution, much of it connected with the temple to the goddess Aphrodite, a sex deity.

III. Paul's Relationship to the Church at Corinth

Initial Visit as part of the 2nd Missionary Journey (50-52 A.D.; Acts 18:1-18)

After leaving Athens, Paul arrived at Corinth and immediately met Priscilla and Aquila. They shared a common trade: tent making/leatherworking. Through his work during the week and preaching in the synagogue every Sabbath, a church was planted. Paul's ministry continued for 18 months before sailing for Antioch.

Letter A – “Previous letter” addressing association with immoral believers (1 Cor 5:9).

Paul Receives Visitors from Corinth (1 Cor 1:11-12; 16:15-18)

These visitors also carry a letter addressed to Paul from the Corinthians.

Letter B - 1 Corinthians carried by Timothy (from Ephesus, A.D. 55)

The growing tensions between Paul and the Corinthians is evident already.

See particularly (1 Cor 4:18-19; 9:3-4; and 14:37-38). Timothy's return to Paul at Ephesus brought disturbing news, which caused Paul to change his travel plans (1 Cor 16:5-9).

"Painful" Visit as part of the 3rd Missionary Journey (2 Cor 2:1-5)

Instead of journeying through Macedonia and then to Corinth, Paul sailed directly for Corinth with the intent to set them straight. Upon Paul's arrival, an individual launched a personal attack against Paul. Sadly, Paul found no support from the church (2 Cor 2:3-5).

Letter C - The "tearful" or "painful" letter (2 Cor 2:3-4)

This letter, no longer in existence (although some suggest it is preserved in 2 Cor 10-13), demanded that the Corinthians take action against Paul's antagonist, among other things. Titus would carry the letter and meet Paul with a report in Troas at a designated time. Paul arrived there but Titus was a no show. Paul's anxiety about the letter caused him to move in haste to Macedonia hoping to intercept Titus (2 Cor 2:12-13). Paul did meet up with Titus in Macedonia and the report was good news! They had affirmed their affection for Paul by punishing the one who had attacked Paul on the earlier visit.

Letter D - 2 Corinthians (from Macedonia, 56 A.D.)

The letter expresses Paul's relief and joy at the positive response, explains his earlier actions, including changing his travel plans and writing the “tearful” letter (2 Cor 1:15-2:4), detailed instructions about the offering for the Jerusalem Church (2 Cor 8-9), and concluded with a return to concern about lingering accusations against Paul by a group of “super apostles” (2 Cor 10-13).

Paul's Third and Final Visit to Corinth (Acts 20:2-3).

This three-month visit reveals a much-improved situation. Unfortunately, 1 Clement (A.D. 95) reveals a church once again in conflict. Some things seem never to change!

IV. The Situation Paul Addressed

In light of the record of Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church, it appears Paul wrote to address three major issues.

A. Paul had tackled the open attack against his apostolic credentials by a specific individual in the church in the “tearful” letter. 2 Cor 2:5-11 reveals that problem had been resolved. Paul desired to show his appreciation that they had followed his instructions, but also to compel them to show forgiveness and mercy to the individual in order that Satan not outwit them (2 Cor 2:11).

B. Outsiders had injected themselves into the Corinthian church with the intent of bringing the congregations under their control. Paul calls them false apostles, deceitful workers, and “super-apostles,” in a most sarcastic tone (2 Cor 11:5, 13; 12:11). They were critical of Paul’s personal integrity as well as his pastoral style. They challenged Paul’s integrity based on the change of his travel plans earlier, even though the alteration came as a result of the worsening situation at Corinth (2 Cor 1:17-22). Although the “tearful” letter had resolved many of the problems, there were still pockets of allegiance to these false apostles. They even pointed to the “tearful” letter itself to charge Paul with being tough in his letters but weak in presence and therefore not capable of providing oversight of the church (2 Cor 10:10).

C. Paul shows concern that the questions about his apostolic ministry and leadership threaten the progress of the collection for the churches. So, Paul writes to urge them to complete the offering.

The result of Paul’s need to address these situations is a letter that offers our most penetrating and extensive discussion of what cruciform ministry should look like. As a result of the need to address such grave conflict, the letter offers our richest theology of God’s reconciling work in Christ, and our call to be ministers of that reconciliation. As a result of Paul’s fear that the offering is not going well, the letter offers a profound connection between God’s grace in Christ as a catalyst for showing grace to others.

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2 CORINTHIANS COMMENTARY

Opening (1:1-2)

The typical Pauline greeting detailing (1) sender, (2) recipients, and (3) greeting. Paul refers to himself as an apostle (9/13 letters), and also stresses the origin of his apostolic credentials (see also Galatians 1:1-3). He is an official delegate of Christ Jesus and ultimately it is by the will of God, the final arbiter. Paul also reminds his hearers that as God's people they are "saints," that is, people set apart, dedicated to God's purposes. "They are to be separated from the world and unto God" (Hafemann, 326).

Thanksgiving: The Comfort of God in the Midst of Human Suffering (1:3-11)

Rather than the typical thanksgiving, Paul employs a blessing directed to God. These verses introduce several central themes of the letter such as comfort, affliction, and suffering.

I. Comfort in the midst of Suffering (1:3-7)

A. Comfort is not a good feeling, like a comfortable bed. It is God's gift that provides a way through suffering. Paul's emphasis on "comfort" is evident in the repetition of the Greek word *παρακαλέω/παρακλήσις*, which appears ten times between 1:3-7. The word means to comfort, console, or encourage. Contrary to our conception of comfort it is not a feeling, like a comfortable bed. It is God's gift that provides a way through suffering. As C.K. Barrett correctly notes, "It is clear that comfort means not that Paul is consoled *in* his afflictions, but that he is delivered *out of* them," (2 *Corinthians*, Harpers, 60). Christ suffered **for us** and our comfort is **through Christ** and both are abundant.

B. Comfort is not given simply for our personal benefit. Rather, God gives us comfort in order that we can comfort others in their affliction. We are to be conduits, not containers, a body of freshwater freely flowing to others rather than stagnate, like the Dead Sea.

C. Prosperity is not a signal of God's favor any more than affliction and suffering is a sign of God's displeasure.

II. Paul's Comfort in the midst of Suffering (8-11)

It becomes evident that Paul is not thinking of suffering in general, or even the suffering of the Corinthians, but his own suffering as an apostle. God rescued Paul out of his suffering and provided comfort. In the face of such an experience, Paul had hope in (1) God's faithfulness and (2) the prayers of God's people. This is a powerful reminder of the power of Christian *koinōnia*. His own suffering is an instrument of comfort for the Corinthians.

Body (1:12-13:10)

I. The Character, Conduct, and Crisis of Paul's Ministry (1:12-7:16)

This is the first of three major sections of the body of Paul's letter. It is also composed of three sections. Paul's purpose in this section is to bring closure to the estrangement between Paul and this church as a result of his painful visit. The painful letter had brought reconciliation, but some issues needed further resolution.

A. Paul's Defense of His Travel Plans (1:12-2:13)

This section provides insight into the hostility between Paul and the Corinthians that had erupted since the writing of 1 Corinthians. An important part of that period was Paul's cancellation of a promised trip to Corinth and in its place a "tearful letter" that he sent. These events resulted in harsh criticism of Paul by certain false teachers who challenged Paul's integrity as an apostle. In response, Paul provides a defense and a demonstration that he is the true apostle and father of the Corinthian congregation.

1. Paul's Integrity Rooted in God's Faithfulness (1:12-22)

It seems that Paul's failure to make a third visit to Corinth as planned was portrayed by his opponents as part of an elaborate plan to defraud the church. If Paul were a true apostle in close relationship with God, he would plan his itinerary accordingly. Thus, Paul's "yes" would be "yes" because it was rooted in God's faithfulness. Instead, the fact that he would make plans "yes," and then have to change them, "no," reveals his apostleship is "according to the flesh." In defense of such charges, Paul begins with a "boast" (v.12). Boasting plays a significant role in Paul's writings, particularly 2 Corinthians. The verb *καυχάομαι*, "I boast," occurs 37 times in the New Testament, 36 times in Paul, 20 times in 2 Corinthians. The noun *καύχησις*, "boast" occurs 11 times in the NT, 10 times in Paul, and 3 times in 2 Corinthians. When used in reference to his opponents, boasting has the sense of bragging on one's own achievements, "tooting one's own horn." When Paul employs the term of himself, it refers to Paul's confidence in his final vindication by God. Paul's boast is an expression of his confidence in God. Paul boasts that his plans were made without guile. He did not come on a second visit because he did not want to come in judgment; he wanted to show mercy and wait for reconciliation. Paul concludes the section with a defense of his apostleship. He does it with a series of four participles. First, Paul employs a present participle to emphasize that God is continually establishing Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus as apostles. He then follows with three aorist participles, describing what God has already done: He has anointed, sealed, and given us His Spirit in our hearts.

2. Paul's Change of Travel Plans as an Act of Mercy (1:23-2:4)

If Paul had made the immediate second visit as planned, they would have gotten "harsh" Paul. Instead, Paul, the great letter writer, determined to fire off a letter so "harsh" that it caused him tears to write. The letter allowed Paul to address the issues with proper reflection rather than the heat that might come from another face-to-face encounter.

3. Paul's Call for the Corinthians to also Act with Mercy (2:5-11)

Part of the issue at Corinth involves an individual who had attacked Paul personally. The tearful letter had instructed the church to punish the offender (2:6). The letter had persuaded them to take action against the offender. The Corinthians had repented and punished the offender. Now that action had been taken, it was now time to extend grace and forgiveness, that is, love.

4. Paul's Love for the Corinthians (2:12-13)

Paul concludes the section by relating his decision to leave Troas, even though his evangelistic opportunity was great there. He could not stop worrying about how the church had received the "tearful" letter. He seems to have expected Titus, the carrier

of the letter, to meet him there, but there was no sign of him. So, he departed Troas and made his way through Macedonia hoping to run into Titus. Despite the opportunities at Troas, his pastoral heart would not allow him to delay. His concern for them was the consequence of his love for them.

B. The Character of Paul's Ministry (2:14-7:4)

Having answered some of the challenges to his integrity as an apostle based on recent events in his relationship with the Corinthian church, Paul "embarks upon the most profound discussion of apostolic ministry found in the New Testament," (Matera, 65). Since the entire letter revolves around ministry, these chapters form the heart and soul of the letter. This section can be divided into five parts.

1. Paul's Ministry of Suffering (2:14-17)

Paul opens his discussion of the character of apostolic ministry with three metaphors at the heart of ministry.

- a. Suffering as Triumphant Procession (2:14a)
- b. Suffering as Fragrant Sacrifice (2:14b-16)
- c. Suffering Because He Is Not a Peddler of the Word (2:17)

2. Paul's Ministry of the Spirit (3:1-18)

Rather than understanding his suffering as evidence of the illegitimacy of his apostleship and the lack of the Spirit's power in his life, Paul argues that his ministry is a public demonstration of the outpouring of the Spirit in the hearts of his churches. The whole section is built around a series of rhetorical questions that force the Corinthians to commend the work of the Spirit in Paul's ministry rather than Paul commending himself. Ultimately, Paul argues that the work of the Spirit results in the absolute transformation of those who are in Christ. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Freedom from what? Freedom from the hard-heartedness that previously separated God from Israel. Now, in Christ, the veil can be removed, the veil that was hiding God's glory so that we would not be destroyed. Now, we are able to glimpse the glory of the Lord in the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (4:4), and who is restoring the very image of God in us, from glory to glory.

3. Paul's Ministry as Treasure in a Clay Pot (4:1-5:10)

Paul continues a defense of his ministry by explaining the basis of his boldness and courage despite hardships.

- a. Boldness Inspired by Mercy (4:1-15)
 - (1) Confidence Rooted in God's Mercy (4:1-6)

To begin, Paul's boldness and courage are prompted by God's mercy in calling him of all people to be a minister of the glory of the gospel.

- (2) The Glory of the Gospel in Fragile Human Pottery (4:7-12)

While Paul's enemies criticized him because of his frail body (2 Cor 10:10), it was in the weakness of his body that God's glory shined most brightly.

These hardships caused cracks in him as an earthen vessel, but the vessel itself remains intact. "The vessel is held together by the power of the divine adhesive, and the light that shines through these cracks is none other than the light of the life of Jesus" (John T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel*, 176).

(3) Confidence Rooted in the Resurrection (4:13-15)

b. Boldness Inspired by Future Hope (4:16-5:10)

Not only is Paul's boldness inspired by God's grace and mercy in calling him, but also in his belief in the resurrection. He now expands on the issue he raised in 4:13-15, giving attention to suffering and glory, the temporary and the permanent.

(1) The Hope of Glory (4:16-18)

Echoing the opening of 4:1, Paul declares, "we do not lose heart," that is, we are courageous/bold, despite the reality that "our outer person," that is, what the world is able to see, the "earthen vessel," is afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down. On the other hand, the "inner person" is being renewed daily.

The "inner person" is not visible to others. It comes close to what Paul means by the soul. This is the eternal aspect of a person that represents the new creation (5:17). Most importantly, Paul is contrasting the temporal and the eternal. The mortal body, which is visible to others, is temporary, while the inner person, God's ongoing new creation, is eternal.

(2) The Earthly and Heavenly Dwelling (5:1-10)

Paul continues the contrast of the temporary and the eternal with the contrast of the earthly and heavenly dwelling. The present existence in the body is like a tent, temporary, fragile, mortal, subject to decay. To be at home in this tent, that is, to live in our present state as humans, is to be away from the Lord, who is in heaven. This present "earthly tent" is the "earthen vessel (4:7), the "outer person" (4:16). In contrast, we have a building from God, an eternal dwelling, not made by human hands." In v. 2, Paul changes the metaphor from buildings to clothing that one puts on. Paul made the same connection in 1 Cor 15:53-54 where he spoke of the present as putting on the clothing of corruptibility and mortality, that is, our present bodily existence versus putting on what is incorruptible and immortal, that is, the resurrection body. Finally, Paul asserts in 5:9-10 that living our present bodily existence carries with it moral responsibility. There will be a day of accounting when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

4. Paul's Ministry of Reconciliation (5:11-6:13)

Up to this point, Paul has described his ministry in three ways: (1) it was a ministry characterized by suffering (2:12-17), (2) it was a ministry of the Spirit, validated and energized by the power of God's Spirit (3:1-18), and (3) it was a ministry characterized by human weakness, a treasure in a clay pot (4:1-5:10).

Now, Paul introduces a final description of his ministry: He is Christ's ambassador who declares the good news of God's work in Christ in order to reconcile the world to Himself. In short, Paul's ministry is a ministry of reconciliation.

a. The Motivation for the Ministry of Reconciliation (5:11-15)

Ultimately, it is the "love of Christ" that compels Paul and provides his greatest motivation. The Greek phrase leaves a certain amount of ambiguity. Love of Christ, ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ could be subjective or objective genitive, that is Christ's love for Paul (subjective) or Paul's love for Christ (objective). Perhaps the best answer is both and, rather than either or.

Paul's brief summary of the gospel packs a powerful punch. Never has more theology been packed into fewer words. "one died for all, therefore all died." The statement interprets the nature and extent of Christ's death.

(1) To begin, the preposition "for" (γάρ) indicates that Jesus' death was "for" us in the sense of being for our benefit: if God is *for us*, who can be against us" (Rom 8:31). But that little preposition also carries the sense of taking humanities place. That is, Christ's death was a substitutionary death. Paul seems to leave no doubt about this in v. 21: "*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" Thus, Jesus' death was both "on our behalf" and "in our place."

(2) It declares that Christ's atoning death was not limited nor was it particular. I would interpret the "all" as universal. It is the most natural way to interpret "all." See also John 1:29; Rom 5:18; 1 Tim 2:5-6; Heb 2:9; 2 Pet 3:9; 1 John 2:1-2. I would argue strongly that **there is no limit to the sufficiency of Christ's atoning work.** (3) "Therefore, all died." This little phrase, often overlooked, is surprising. We might have expected Paul to say, "one died for all, therefore all lived." So, in what sense do "all die?" The idea seems to be all dying "with Christ."

b. The Nature of God's Work of Reconciliation (5:16-21)

The Atoning death of Jesus has at least four results: (1) People are no longer to be regarded from a human point of view (v.16). We must learn to look beyond the "outward man. (2) A new creation has begun (v. 17). The death of Jesus affected a seismic shift in the creation and a complete transformation in those who believe. (3) We are reconciled with God (vv. 18-19). It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of 'reconciliation' language in Paul's understanding of the work of God in Christ. Indeed, some scholars argue that reconciliation is the center of Paul's theology. God's work of making peace with sinful, hostile human beings through the blood of Christ's cross is a central component of Paul's theology. In Christ, God did what human beings were incapable of doing for themselves. Rather than counting our trespasses against us, God has acted to remove them. In so doing, for those who confess Jesus, God changes our status from enemy to friend. (4) We are now ministers of reconciliation (19-21)

For Paul, however, it was not enough merely to be reconciled himself, he felt his ministry was to be an agent of reconciliation. This was an all-consuming responsibility for Paul. As Ralph Martin asserts, 'it is the one clear job description Paul has left on record.'

c. Paul's Defense of His Ministry of Reconciliation (6:1-13)

The gospel of reconciliation depends, to some degree, on the integrity of those who proclaim it. As a result, Paul feels the need to defend his integrity both in word and deed. Once again, Paul appeals to his harsh trials and moral integrity as a defense of his ministry. Gorman refers to vv 4-10 as a "rhetorical tour de force," (like 4:7-12) (308). Paul describes the difficult (6:4-5), virtuous (6:6-7) and antithetical (8-10) character of his ministry.

In light of Paul's candid and extensive defense of the nature of his ministry among the Corinthians, Paul said, "our *mouth* was open to you (6:11), our *hearts* were likewise wide open (literally, "enlarged") to the Corinthians, and our affections,

literally “*bowels*,” were not restricted from them. Thus, with every fiber of his being, Paul loved them.

5. Paul’s Appeal for Full Reconciliation with the Corinthian Church (6:14-7:4)
This section begins with the command not to be unequally yoked, a text that has suffered under a terrible burden of misinterpretation. There are at least two reasons for this: (1) It is almost always taken out of context, and (2) the assumption that the yoke has to do with marriage. Ultimately, the text is about believers maintaining certain boundaries between themselves and nonbelievers. The issue was the purity/holiness of God’s people. The last rhetorical question, “what agreement has the temple of God with idols?” leads to the now familiar assertion for the Corinthians that they were “a temple of the living God” (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). Extreme care must be exercised in order to maintain the purity of God’s dwelling place.

C. Paul’s Comfort and Joy (7:5-16)

Sometimes, our most profound ministry occurs in times of greatest conflict. Paul risked so much, yet he had confidence that they would be reconciled. Paul concludes this lengthy section of defense of his ministry with words of rejoicing because of his confidence in the Corinthians. Despite the history of alienation between Paul and the church, Paul has not lost confidence in them. The tearful letter had brought about reconciliation. They had dealt with Paul’s opponent at Corinth. The relationship has, to a large degree, been restored. Now, on to the business of the collection for the church at Jerusalem.

II. The Grace of God as Motivation for Grace to Others (8-9)

In 2 Cor 8-9, Paul turns his attention to the offering Paul has been collecting for the church at Jerusalem since the Jerusalem Council (Gal 2), when they urged him to remember the poor. While Luke hardly mentions the collection in Acts (Acts 24:17), it is clear that Paul assigned great weight to it. He mentioned it in Roman 15:25-29, 1 Cor 16:1-4, and Gal 2:10. It was an offering from Paul’s Gentile churches for the Jewish Christian church in Jerusalem. Paul hoped it would strengthen the relationship between the two churches and unify them. The continued emphasis on the offering, however, opened Paul up for criticism from his opponents. There was the risk that the overwhelmingly poor churches would not give sufficiently. Also, Paul opened himself up to charges that he was greedy or dishonest. Paul’s had addressed the offering a year earlier in 1 Cor 16:1-4. He had instructed them to give regularly and systematically, “on the first day of the week, each one was to put an offering aside,” proportionally, “as he may prosper,” and freely, “so that contributions need not be made when I come.” The problems in the church since that time, including Paul’s painful visit and tearful letter, would not foster a charitable spirit. Thus, Paul is concerned about the progress of the collection.

The section is held together by “grace.” The section begins, “We want you to know, brothers, about the grace (χάρις) of God granted to the churches of Macedonia (2 Cor 8:1) and concludes “Thanks (χάρις) be to God for his indescribable gift (2 Cor 9:15). It also points to the central role “grace” plays in the entire section, occurring ten times (8:1, 4, 6-7, 9, 16, 19; 9:8, 14-15).

A. The Need for the Corinthians to Complete the Offering (8:1-15)

1. God's Grace Displayed in Macedonia (8:1-6)

Paul's begins his attempt to motivate the Corinthians to complete the offering by appealing to the generosity of the churches in Macedonia, namely churches in Philippi and Thessalonica.

2. God's Grace Displayed to the Corinthians (8:7-15)

God had showered the Corinthian church with abundant grace in all things, particularly the spiritual gifts (1 Cor 1:7). As a result, Paul called on them to abound in abundant grace toward the Jerusalem church.

B. Commendation of the Delegation (8:16-24)

Paul commends the delegation of three co-workers who will prepare the collection before Paul arrives: Titus, Paul's devoted partner and co-worker, who has the same care for the Corinthians as Paul; an unnamed brother who was well known for his service to the gospel; and another unnamed man who was especially charged by the Macedonian churches for the administration and delivery of the collection (8:19).

C. The Need for the Corinthians to Give Generously (9:1-15)

Chapter 9 continues the same theme.

1. The Need to Be Prepared (9:1-5)

Paul has boasted about the Macedonians to the Corinthians in chapter 8 in order to motivate them to give like the Macedonians. Now, he urges the Corinthians to live up to the boasting he had done about them to the Macedonians. If they don't follow through, it will be embarrassment for Paul.

2. The Principle of Generous Giving (9:6-9)

With the delegation on the way to complete the offering, Paul urges the Corinthians to give generously. Paul employs the principle of sowing and reaping as a theological basis for giving liberally and cheerfully.

3. The Indescribable Gift (9:10-15)

Paul had exhorted the Corinthians to give generously to the offering. Now, he turns the focus to God, who is the source of generous giving, ultimately expressing thanks to God for the gift of salvation.

III. The Power of God and Paul's Weakness (10:1-13:10)

Suddenly, the letter takes a decisively different tone. In 2 Cor 1:12-7:15, Paul has a rich theological exposition of his ministry of reconciliation. In the course of his discussion, he defended the integrity of his ministry. He explained why he sent the tearful letter, and why he had to change his travel plans. The conclusion of the section recounted Titus' good news that the Corinthians had repented. The sense is, the relationship is on the mend. In the central section, Paul urged the Corinthians to complete the offering they had started over a year ago. Part of his appeal was how much he bragged to the Macedonians about them and if they don't follow through it would be embarrassment for him. In this third and final section, the letter takes an in-your-face, defense of his ministry as well as a no-holds-barred attack on a group of so-called apostles. In fact, the tone of the letter changes so dramatically, that many scholars have argued that 10-13 is a separate letter, and perhaps even the tearful letter that Paul mentioned in 2 Cor 2:3-4, which would mean it was earlier than 2 Cor 1-9. Others argue that it was written some time after ch. 1-9 in response

to a deteriorating situation. I would argue that Paul wrote it as a central part of this letter.

A. Paul's Declaration of War (10:1-11)

1. The Charge (10:1-2)

One charge stands out that Paul wants to refute: When he is present, he is timid and unimpressive; when he is absent he fires off blistering letters sent through his delegates. He throws his weight around when he is away, but he is a paper apostle when present. They also charge that he walks "according to the flesh," that is, Paul lacks spiritual power.

2. The Defense (10:3-11)

Paul begins by affirming that he walks "in the flesh," that is, he lives in the world. However, he does not wage war "according to the flesh," that is, he does not employ merely human weapons. He uses divine weapons that carry spiritual power. Paul is the soldier who destroys spiritual strongholds with his arsenal of spiritual weapons. One can't help but think of Eph 6 and the armor of God, namely, the sword of the Spirit, which is the gospel, the word of God. Against his spiritual artillery, no opposing fortification or tower can stand. Paul *tears down, captures, and stands ready to punish*.

B. Paul's Rules of Engagement (10:12-18)

Paul begins by ridiculing his opponents for *comparing* themselves with each other rather than examining themselves honestly. Paul deadpans that he certainly would not dare compare himself with these who have made themselves the standard for what a true apostle looks like. His only standard of measure is what God does in and through him. "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord" (Jer 9:23-24) (v. 17).

C. Paul's Foolish Boasting (11:1-12:13)

Having established the kind of boasting he would do, boasting in God, Paul begins a project of foolish boasting. Paul seems to be in a Catch 22 situation. He has established that self-commendation is futile and foolish. However, because the Corinthians have failed to defend Paul, he must defend himself lest the community might be persuaded that the charges against Paul's apostleship have legitimacy. To boast is foolish; to fail to boast is to risk the fools gaining the upper hand. What is an apostle to do?

1. The Grounds of Paul's Boasting (11:1-6)

Paul casts himself as a father of the bride to be of the Corinthian church. In this role, he feels obligated to cast a watchful eye over the church and her purity until the wedding day.

2. The Charge against Paul by the Super Apostles (11:7-15)

The primary charge they make against Paul is that he carried out his ministry free of charge. He had worked with his own hands so as not to burden them (1 Thess 2:9). We might celebrate such a bi-vocational minister, but in a city like Corinth, with citizenry of wealth and power, the appearance of their apostle doing the menial labor of a slave might have called into question his claim to be God's ambassador. Refusing to accept a fee from the Corinthians opened Paul up to the charge that his ministry was not worthy of pay because of his lack of rhetorical skill and knowledge. They were using the tried and true cliché, "you get what you pay for." Paul uses sarcasm, "well excuuuuuse me for humbling myself so that you could be exalted.

And please, forgive me for not demanding money from you in exchange for the gospel.

3. Paul's Appeal to Bear with His Boasting (11:16-21a)

Before beginning his boasts, Paul appeals on the Corinthians to indulge him as he steps outside of the Lord's authority and makes a fool of himself in order to show the foolishness of the super-apostles and the foolishness of the Corinthians to be persuaded by them. Again, with the sarcasm dripping from the page, Paul concludes, "to my shame, I must say, were too weak for such behavior, the kind of power that carries out ministry for a fee, they prey on you (like birds of prey), rather than praying for you, they make slaves of you and give you a slap on the cheek. You are right, we were too weak for that!

4. Paul's Foolish Boasts (11:21b-12:13)

a. Paul Boasts about His Jewish Credentials (22-23a)

b. Paul Boasts in his Apostolic Credentials (23b-33)

Above all else, Paul's weakness is the ultimate proof that his apostleship is genuine.

c. Paul Boasts in His Heavenly Vision (12:1-10)

This "boast" does not fit easily into the category of boasting in weakness. Such experiences could cause a person to boast genuinely. Therefore, to keep Paul from becoming conceited (12:7), God gave him a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan.

The speculation about the meaning of the thorn revolves around four categories:

-Mental anguish – That Paul wrestled with depression resulting either from his suffering or the tragic death of his wife (Jerome Murphy O'Connor)

-A particular human adversary – Alexander the coppersmith (2 Tim 4:14), Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim 2:17), or another who is unnamed. Perhaps in this context, the super-apostles are an excellent possibility.

-Physical ailment – malaria, epilepsy, headaches, a speech impediment, or most interesting, an eye problem (see 4:13-14 along with Acts 14:19 @ Lystra).

-His ongoing hardships as an apostle of Christ.

Whatever it was, God allowed Satan's angel to torment him for a good purpose.

Paul prayed three times that it be removed, but God said, No, "my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Once more, Paul returns to the theme that when he is weak, then he is strong in the Lord (12:9-10).

d. The Foolish Speech Ends (12:11-13)

D. Paul's Plans for a Third Visit (12:14-13:10)

Paul now turns his attention to his plan to visit them for a third time.

1. He Will Not Take Their Money When He Arrives (12:14-21)

2. He Will Demand Their Repentance (13:1-10)

Conclusion (13:11-13)

Paul closes the letter a farewell, a series of four brief exhortations urging unity and peace, greetings, and a wonderful benediction. The Trinitarian nature of the benediction is a fitting conclusion to the letter. Paul opened with the Trinitarian God in 1:21-22, and now he concludes with the same.