
Introduction

Second Corinthians is part of the lively correspondence between the Apostle Paul and the congregation he founded on the Peloponnesian coast of Greece in ca. A.D. 50–51. In all likelihood, 2 Corinthians is not the “second” letter of Paul to the Corinthians, for he mentions two other letters, which are probably no longer extant: one sent before the writing of 1 Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9), and another sent between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians (cf. 2 Cor. 2:3–4). Hence, 2 Corinthians is at least the apostle’s fourth letter to the Corinthians, written in ca. A.D. 55/56.

Second Corinthians reveals much about Paul’s conception of himself, as he vigorously defends his apostolic claim in Corinth against internal dissension and external intrusion. However, since Paul gives us only his response to the developing situation in the Corinthian church, we must try to piece together a complete picture of the church from often sketchy evidence. Indeed, 2 Corinthians presents such an intractable complex of exegetical problems that Pauline scholarship has been unable to come to any consensus on them.¹ The following commentary represents merely one attempt to get at the meaning of the text within its original historical, literary, and theological context.²

1. Occasion and Purpose of the Letter

Between the writing of the letters we now call “First” and “Second” Corinthians, the situation in Corinth had changed dramatically. When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, his apostleship was not yet under attack within the Corinthian church, though its significance was being diluted by the many other “guardians” who were gaining influence (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10–12; 4:15). In 1 Corinthians, Paul could therefore point to his apostolic weakness and suffering as a basis of authority and exhortation (cf. 1 Cor. 2:3–4; 4:8–17), for at the time of the writing of 1 Corinthians, the

problem was largely *within* the church, not between the church and its apostle.³

When he wrote 2 Corinthians, however, Paul's legitimacy as an apostle was itself being called into question *because* of his weakness and suffering. Under the influence of the "false apostles" (cf. 2 Cor. 10:4, 13–15), some within the church were interpreting Paul's apostolic lifestyle of suffering and weakness as a sure sign that his claim to be a true apostle of Jesus Christ was fraudulent. The devastating effects of these sufferings on his mortal body were taken as proof positive that Paul was far from the God-appointed mediator of the life-giving Spirit that he claimed to be.

Obviously, Paul's foothold in Corinth was slipping, and he had to do something to secure his position before it was too late. Everything he had worked for during the eighteen-month founding visit (cf. Acts 18:1–18) was beginning to unravel. So when the crisis first began to develop shortly after the writing of 1 Corinthians, Paul changed his travel plans as originally announced in 1 Corinthians 16:5–9 and made an emergency trip to Corinth. It was now his intention, after visiting the church there and settling matters himself, to journey north into Macedonia and then return again to Corinth on his way to Jerusalem. By doing so, he hoped to give the Corinthians a "double pleasure" (2 Cor. 1:15–16).⁴ When Paul arrived in Corinth, however, he found himself the object of a painful attack (2 Cor. 2:5; 7:12). A faction within the church, led by an unnamed member, evidently slandered Paul, while the congregation as a whole stood idly by, perhaps out of fear (cf. Gal. 2:12) or complicity. Paul does not mention what the nature of the offense was, but we may surmise that it had something to do with Paul's apostolic authority.⁵

Rather than trying to solve the problem right then and there and possibly precipitating a purge in the process (cf. 1:23; 13:10), the apostle decided to retreat temporarily from Corinth and allow a cooling-off period. Hence, instead of returning to Corinth after journeying to Macedonia, he changed his travel plans once again by making his way straight back to Ephesus (2 Cor. 1:23; 2:1). From there he shot off a scathing letter, written "out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears" (2:3–4). This "tearful letter," which is probably no longer extant,⁶ called upon the Corinthians to demonstrate their solidarity with Paul and to punish the one who had offended him (2:3, 4; 7:8, 12).

The letter was presumably delivered by Titus, one of Paul's trusted coworkers. In any case, it was from Titus, returning from his visit to Corinth, that Paul expected news of the Corinthians' response to his letter, apparently confident of a positive outcome (2 Cor. 7:14–16). Paul planned to meet Titus in Troas, so he left Ephesus and made his way there. He found an excellent evangelistic opportunity in Troas, but because Titus had not yet come, and because he was so anxious to meet him and to find out how the Corinthians had responded, he left, traveling northward and crossing over into Macedonia in hope of intercepting Titus on his way to Troas (2 Cor. 2:12–13). When Paul reached Macedonia, he found himself embroiled in the bitter persecution that the churches of Macedonia themselves were experiencing (7:5; 8:1–2), and this only compounded his anxiety. When Titus finally arrived, Paul was greatly comforted at the news of the Corinthians' repentance and reconciliation (7:5–7, 13–16). Titus told Paul of the Corinthians' zeal to demonstrate their affection and loyalty by punishing the one who had slandered him.

Paul responded to this good news by writing another letter, our 2 Corinthians. Here he stated how glad he was that the Corinthians had acted so vigorously to clear themselves. He urged them now to forgive and restore the offender "in order that Satan might not outwit us" (2:5–11). The tone of this part of the letter is overall quite positive.

We must not get the impression, however, that all was well again in Corinth and that the apostle had no more cause for concern, for the situation that had prompted his emergency visit to the city was still festering. A careful reading of 2 Corinthians itself reveals that only an uneasy truce had been reached, and the final outcome had yet to be decided. While Paul had many supporters in Corinth, and "the majority" had willingly carried out his directives (cf. 2:6), some had lingering doubts about him, particularly about his erratic travel plans, his handling of collection funds, his bodily weakness, and his apostolic authority. Still others in the congregation were downright hostile. Furthermore, the "false apostles" remained, fueling dissension in the Corinthian house churches and trying to extend their own influence at Paul's expense.

Therefore, despite the precarious situation, Paul thought that the time was ripe to announce a third visit to Corinth. To wait any longer might mean losing the church completely, although, of

course, coming at this time might also precipitate the purge he had hoped to avoid during the second, painful visit. Ever since writing 1 Corinthians, Paul had promised to come to Corinth for an extended visit (1 Cor. 16:5–9). Though circumstances in Corinth had hitherto caused him to change his travel plans several times, he now planned to make good on that promise. In preparation for the visit, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians with several purposes in mind. First, he wanted to shore up and extend the existing support he had in Corinth. Second, Paul wanted to bolster his sagging image both by answering charges and by defending his apostolic authority. Third, he wanted to warn any unrepentant rebels that there would be a showdown when he arrived. Finally, he wanted to resume the collection for Jerusalem initiated in 1 Corinthians (16:1–4).

2. Form and Structure of the Letter

Although many interpreters regard 2 Corinthians as a composite of several Pauline letter fragments that were arranged and pasted together by a later redactor, the canonical letter is the only form of the document that was ever transmitted in the textual tradition.⁷ Therefore, we must try to make sense of the final form of the letter as we now have it.

Taken as a whole, the literary form of 2 Corinthians can be described as an appeal for concord,⁸ which seeks to calm the outbreak of faction by dissuading from strife and exhorting to harmony. In 2 Corinthians 13:11, the apostle exhorts the Corinthians to “listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. . . .” As we have seen, the Corinthian church is wracked with dissension among factions in the congregation (cf. 2 Cor. 12:20; 1 Cor. 1:10). As we shall see later, Paul evidently views the situation in light of Korah’s rebellion against Moses and Aaron in Numbers 16–17. Therefore, Paul calls the congregation back to harmony both with himself and with each other in order to avoid divine judgment.

The peace of which Paul speaks in 2 Corinthians 13:11 is not just a cessation from strife, but rather a state of mutual harmony based on genuine agreement in the truth of Paul’s gospel (cf. v. 8), which Paul regards as ultimately inseparable from himself as an apostle. Since Paul is an apostle commissioned by God through Christ, whose missionary work itself was an embodiment and expression of his gospel, being of one mind

necessarily includes accepting Paul and his apostleship (cf. 6:1–2). Throughout the letter, Paul emphasizes various aspects of the mutuality between himself and the Corinthians (cf., e.g., 1:1–2, 3–11, 14, 18–22, 24; 2:2; 3:18; 4:12, 14; 6:11–13; 7:2; 8:1, 16–17; 9:11; 12:14–15; 13:11). Speaking to his “brothers” in Christ, who are “sons” of the Father and who are being transformed into “the same image” of the resurrected Lord, Paul appeals to the Corinthians to reflect that transformation by “thinking the same thing.”

Second Corinthians clearly consists of three main parts: chapters 1–7, 8–9, and 10–13. Each of these sections mentions and in some way makes preparation for Paul’s imminent third visit to Corinth. By that time at the latest, the apostle expects the congregation to submit to his appeal for concord in all of its ramifications or else face the consequences. In the *first* section (chs. 1–7), Paul presents a defense of the legitimacy of his apostleship in the face of various accusations against him in Corinth, including his change of travel plans (cf. 1:12–2:13). His imminent third visit is considered in light of the debacle of his second visit and the subsequent repentance of the Corinthians. Paul encourages the Corinthians to dissociate themselves fully from his opponents in Corinth (e.g., 2:17; 5:12; 6:8; 6:14–7:1) and to evaluate his apostleship in light of a valid criterion (“the heart”) rather than the criterion of the opponents (“the face”). Clearly, all was not completely resolved, despite Paul’s statements of total confidence (cf. 7:4, 16). Although most of the church had repented (7:5–16), some were evidently still siding with Paul’s opponents, whether actively or passively (cf. 2:6), and complete relapse was a distinct possibility.

In the *second* section of the letter (chs. 8–9), Paul builds on the confidence that he has in the Corinthians by reviving his plan for the Jerusalem collection. But he is still anxious lest some of the Corinthians not fully and willingly cooperate with the collection when he arrives. Perhaps he is worried that his opponents might finally succeed in causing the congregation to disaffect from him completely. Or perhaps he is concerned that a minority in the church at Corinth will disrupt the collection efforts.

Therefore, in the *third* section of the letter (chs. 10–13), Paul prepares for his imminent third visit to Corinth by handling the problem of the opponents in a more frontal way than he has in the previous sections of the letter. In the process, Paul reinforces the defense of his apostleship from 2:14–7:4, particularly in view

of the opponents' attack against its legitimacy. He also warns that any unrepentant Corinthians will encounter the full power of his apostolic authority when he comes. Paul is determined that this third visit to Corinth will not be another debacle.

3. Integrity of the Letter

The foregoing summary of 2 Corinthians, which attempts to understand the letter as a unity, differs sharply from much of the current thinking about 2 Corinthians.⁹ According to many interpreters, the breaks in thought found throughout the letter are evidence that it is really a composite of various Pauline letter fragments. These breaks in thought notwithstanding, most interpreters support the unity of at least chapters 1–9. It is chapters 10–13 that cause 2 Corinthians to be regarded as a composite letter. Since these chapters are written in a tone and about a subject so different from that of chapters 1–9, they are considered a fragment of a letter written either before or after chapters 1–9, for, suddenly, the collection is no longer a subject. Suddenly, Paul's "complete confidence" in the Corinthians dissipates (7:16). Paul begins abruptly in 10:1 with a fierce defense of his apostleship against the attacks of his opponents in the Corinth that differs sharply from his defense in 2:14–7:4.

Many interpreters regard chapters 10–13 as part of the "tearful letter" referred to in 2:3–9 and 7:8–12. In that case, chapters 10–13 would have been written *before* chapters 1–9. However, this view has several difficulties: Chapters 10–13 are missing the instructions to punish the one who offended Paul, and chapters 1–7 do not mention the elimination of the opponents referred to in chapters 10–13. Other interpreters regard the "tearful letter" as lost, and postulate that 2 Corinthians 10–13 were written sometime *after* chapters 1–7 (or 1–9). According to this scenario, the opponents evidently returned to Corinth (or came to Corinth for the first time) and caused the conflict between the church and Paul to flare up once again; hence, Paul goes against the opponents with guns blazing. The main difficulty with this view is that there is no explicit mention in chapters 10–13 that Paul had received fresh information about a relapse at Corinth.

The connection of 2 Corinthians 10–13 to the rest of the letter will remain controversial. It is largely a matter of judgment whether one considers the final section of 2 Corinthians sufficiently different in tone to conclude that it was written at a

different time and under different circumstances from the rest. In principle, a historical reconstruction that can operate with the unity of 2 Corinthians has the advantage over partition theories, since it works with fewer unknowns. For the purposes of the present commentary, 2 Corinthians 10–13 is treated as an integral part of a letter to the Corinthians that originally comprised all thirteen chapters. This position not only coheres with the textual evidence but also makes sense of the complex and volatile situation that Paul faced in Corinth. The apostle had to contend not just with a repentant majority, which he realized could still be tipped against him, but also with a hostile minority still under the influence of the intruders. Seen in this light, the letter is trying to consolidate and extend any gains that have already been made, to correct what is still wrong, and to warn that the final showdown will come when the apostle arrives. This explains the apologetic tenor of the whole letter; the numerous expressions of Paul's anxiety over the developing situation in Corinth, including the role of the intruders; and the positive statements, even the final section, expressing affection (cf., e.g., 1:8; 8:1 and 13:11; 6:11–13 and 12:14–15; 7:1 and 12:20). Paul ultimately hopes that the situation will turn out for the best, if not for all, at least for the majority. But even on this point Paul is willing both in chapters 1–9 and in 10–13 to make positive statements about “all” the Corinthians (cf. 7:13, 15; 8:7; 13:14).

Many correspondences between 2 Corinthians 1–9 and 10–13 will be noted in the course of the commentary. For example, like the first section of the letter, the final section presupposes an ongoing Korah-like rebellion in Corinth that will be crushed by divine judgment when Paul arrives. Both sections refer to Paul's “coming again” and the possibility of another painful visit (cf. 2:1; 12:21). Moreover, like the first section of the letter, the final section presupposes that Paul has had experience with the *merkabah*, which makes him a mediator of divine revelation (note the link between 2:17 and 12:19).¹⁰ While perhaps none of these correspondences is enough in itself to establish the unity of the letter, their cumulative effect is persuasive.

4. Corinth, Achaia, and Paul's Mission to the Nations

Who were the Corinthians from Paul's perspective? How did they fit into his overall missionary strategy as an “apostle to the nations”? How should we understand Paul's notion of apostolic

territoriality, which comes to expression in 2 Corinthians 10:12–18? We will have a difficult time understanding the apostle in this letter if we fail to comprehend his geographical and ethnographic horizon. As we shall see, Paul, as a Diaspora Jew, is a traveler between two radically different “worlds,” or rather conceptions of the world—the Greco-Roman and the Jewish.

On one level, Paul knows the Corinthians as residents of the Roman colony of Corinth, situated at the southwest end of the narrow isthmus connecting mainland Greece and Macedonia with the Peloponnese. With this location, Corinth was uniquely important in ancient times as the junction of the only land route from the north to the south of Greece and as the shortest sea route from Asia Minor to Italy. The commentaries and Bible encyclopedias rehearse the details about how Corinth had been largely destroyed and depopulated in 146 B.C., how the city was refounded as a colony by Julius Caesar in 44 B.C., and how it was later made the capital of the senatorial province of Achaia. Paul himself explicitly identifies the Corinthians in a special way with Achaia (2 Cor. 1:1; 9:2) and pits them in friendly rivalry with Macedonia (8:1–5; 9:2; 11:9–10), another Roman province. He identifies Erastus, one of the members of the Corinthian church, as the “city treasurer” (Rom. 16:23). Certainly, there were many things about the Roman city of Corinth that would have attracted the apostle.

But Paul not only moves in a Roman world, he also travels in a Jewish one. The careful reader of Paul’s letters will realize that his Jewish background shapes his perceptions and influences practically every aspect of his apostolic ministry, not least his view of the world. On the surface, Paul seems merely to appropriate the normal Greco-Roman terminology of his day. Upon closer inspection, however, we will find that Paul shares a fundamentally Jewish perspective on world geography and ethnography.

Paul is generally acknowledged to be the apostle to the nations (Rom. 11:13), tracing his gospel back to the Abrahamic promise (Gen. 12:3 [+ 18:18]): “In you shall all the nations be blessed” (Gal. 3:8). In the OT context of Paul’s modified citation, “all the nations [of the earth]” refers back to the Table of Nations in Genesis 10. In developing his missionary strategy, the former Pharisee and Hebrew of Hebrews appropriated the OT and Jewish tradition of the Table of Nations (Gen. 10; 1 Chron. 1:1–2:2; Ezek. 27, 38–39; Dan. 11; Isa. 66:18–20). Briefly stated, the genealogy of Genesis 10 represents the fundamental view of the

world that continues in subsequent OT and Jewish literature and that is timeless in its applicability.¹¹

As regards the past, although several of the identifications in the list remain uncertain and the criteria by which the nations were distinguished are disputed, the main contours of the earth's division are relatively clear. The world is divided among the three sons of Noah: the nations of *Japheth* in the northern and western lands, including Asia Minor and Europe (Gen. 10:2–5); the nations of *Ham* in Egypt and North Africa (vv. 6–20); and the nations of *Shem* in Mesopotamia and Arabia (vv. 21–31). As Yohanan Aharoni observes, "All of the human family is divided into three main groups which *surrounded Palestine*: the sons of Shem to the east, the sons of Ham to the south and the sons of Japheth to the north and west. . . . The Table of Nations . . . gives a faithful sketch of Palestine's position among the peoples and kingdoms of the ancient Near East where the three spheres of Shem, Ham and Japheth intersected."¹² First Chronicles 1:1–2:2 describes the world and the relationship of nations to Israel as they were at the time of writing in the postexilic period. It lists the nations of the world "in a circle" that moves counterclockwise—from the north, to the west, to the south, and to the east—with Israel in the center.

The Table of Nations is not only valid as a description of the past, but is also reflected in texts about the eschatological future. In Ezekiel 38–39 nations from both the north and the south will converge on the center of the earth to destroy and plunder Israel of the restoration. Isaiah 66:18–20, however, contains a positive future expectation when the nations will see God's glory and participate in Israel's restoration. The Table of Nations is thus seen as the fundamental point of orientation for describing Israel's place among the nations of the world and the basis for envisioning world geography and ethnography in the eschatological future.

This fundamentally Jewish view of the world is evident in the decision of the so-called apostolic council in Galatians 2:7–9, that the apostles observe territorial jurisdictions in their respective missions, probably drawn along the lines of the respective territories of the sons of Noah in the Table of Nations. At the same time, the apostles agree that Paul will undertake a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:10). The decisive impulse for the collection very likely came from Isaiah 66:18–20, mentioned above.

After the apostolic council, territoriality becomes an increasingly important factor for the Pauline mission. On the one hand, it focuses the scope and direction of Paul's mission on reaching Asia Minor and Europe, while maintaining his orientation on the center, Jerusalem. The apostle's mission encompasses the territory of the Japhethites, that is, of the descendants of the third son of Noah who settled in the region of Asia Minor and in Europe from Cilicia to Spain. Acts presents the scope and direction of Paul's mission in much the same light—a mission radiating out from Jerusalem “to the ends of the earth” (cf. Acts 1:8; 13:47), concentrating on Asia Minor and Europe, and complementing the missions to Shem (2:1–8:25) and Ham (8:26–40).

On the other hand, territoriality becomes increasingly important for the Pauline mission because Paul now has a strong sense of his own territorial jurisdiction vis-à-vis that of others (2 Cor. 10:13–16). Paul wants to do pioneering missionary work and not to build on another's foundation (2 Cor. 10:15; Rom. 15:20), although all churches in his jurisdiction, whether founded by him or not, stand under his authority (cf. Rom. 1:5–6). Paul does not infringe on the territory of the Jerusalem apostles, and he expects that they (and/or their emissaries) will not infringe on his. When intrusion does happen, however, Paul immediately responds either offensively (Gal. 2:11–14) or defensively (2 Cor. 10:13–16). For Paul, such actions are an attempt to undermine his apostolic authority and to usurp his God-given apostolic territory. Once we understand, then, the fundamentally Jewish nature of Paul's mission to the nations, we realize that when Paul refers to the Corinthians and to Achaia, he is not merely referring to the Roman colony or to the Roman province, but rather, on a deeper level, to descendants of Japheth to whom he has been especially called as apostle.

When Paul came to Corinth, he looked, from a Jewish geographical perspective, at a center of the Jewish Diaspora. He spent eighteen months in Corinth, preaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and through his influence Crispus and his family were baptized. The Jews of Corinth were embittered by Paul's activities; they brought him before Gallio, proconsul of Achaia. At this point, the Jewish world touches the Roman world. Paul chose Corinth as a base of operations in part because of its importance as a Jewish center, since the synagogue could be used as a basis for spreading the gospel among the Jews of Greece and their sympathizers, the God-

fearers (Acts 18:1–18). His preaching in the synagogue threw the community into a great turmoil, pitting groups of members against each other. One group of Jews forbade Paul to continue preaching in the synagogue; however, many hellenized Jews and Gentile adherents of the synagogue (i.e., God-fearers) were favorably disposed toward Paul. It was the latter group, disciplined in the rituals of the synagogue and leaning toward Judaism, who became the predominant medium through which Paul disseminated the gospel in the region.

5. Paul's Opponents in Corinth

Paul has two groups of opponents in Corinth who challenge his apostolic authority: (1) a minority within the church's own membership, which is probably splintered into several factions, and (2) certain outsiders who infiltrated the church. Together, these groups of insiders and outsiders form an opposition that, for Paul, is tantamount to Korah's rebellion against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness (Num. 16–17). For the moment we will focus on the intruders and their agenda, leaving the subject of the minority within the church to the commentary.

Who are these intruders? Where do they come from? With whose authority do they appear on the scene? What passages in 2 Corinthians refer to them? The secondary literature on these questions is enormous, and the range of scholarly opinion is astonishingly broad.¹³ While we must confess with James D. G. Dunn, that "the character of the opposition (if that itself is a correct description) will never be more than tantalizingly obscure—shadowy figures which seem to emerge with some clarity at some points only to disappear at others behind the shifting mists of our knowledge of the historical context,"¹⁴ we may offer a few salient observations on the subject.

First, we observe that Paul regularly had to deal with opponents who infiltrated the churches he had established, whether in Galatia, Philippi, or Corinth. This does not necessarily mean that all the opponents are the same in each instance, all part of a united counter-Pauline mission. Nevertheless, the possible connection between them—or at least their position—is worth considering, even if that position was modified to fit the Corinthian situation. Very clearly, the intruders in Corinth are Jewish Christians (cf. 2 Cor. 11:22), just as the opponents in Galatia are. Moreover, Paul accuses the interlopers of preaching

a “different gospel” from the one he preached (2 Cor. 11:4), which recalls what Paul writes about a “different gospel” in Galatians 1:6–9. In fact, Paul uses essentially the same argument to combat the opponents in Corinth (cf. 2 Cor. 3:1–18) as he does against the opponents in Galatia (cf. Gal. 3:1–14; 4:1–7). From Paul’s perspective, the intruders in Corinth who tout themselves as “servants of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:15) are really promulgating a “ministry of condemnation” that brings “death” (cf. 3:6–7); hence, they deserve to be “anathema” for preaching a “different gospel” (cf. Gal. 1:6–9).

Second, we notice that the opponents have intruded into what Paul considers his own, God-given apostolic territory (cf. 2 Cor. 10:12–18; 11:4). The intruders’ chief aim, from Paul’s perspective, is to undermine his apostolic authority and to usurp his apostolic territory. As we have seen, Paul seems to understand the territory of the Japhethites as his exclusive apostolic prerogative. Indeed, the apostolic council acknowledged both Paul’s gospel and his rightful claim to a particular territorial jurisdiction (cf. Gal. 2:1–10). Therefore, the apostle repels any attempt to intrude on his territory and to undermine his mission (cf. Gal. 2:11–14). When exactly the intruders arrived on the scene is uncertain; however, since there are references to the interlopers throughout the letter, even in chapters 1–9,¹⁵ we may surmise that Paul’s emergency second visit to Corinth was necessitated by the news of the arrival of the opponents in Corinth. In that case, these infiltrators may have influenced the one who offended Paul during the “painful visit” (2 Cor. 2:5; 7:12).

Third, we find that the intruders introduce themselves as “apostles,” brandishing letters of recommendation (probably from the Jerusalem church) to authenticate their claim (cf. 2 Cor. 3:1)¹⁶ and boasting that they excel Paul in every respect (cf. 11:22–23). They even have visions and revelations of the Lord (cf. 12:1). Paul had to rely on self-recommendation (cf. 3:1; 4:2; 5:12; 6:4–10; 10:12, 18), for the Corinthians did not stand up for him (cf. 12:11) as they should have done both in word and in deed (cf. 3:2–3). What makes the intruders’ claims so deceitful is that they undeniably look and sound better than Paul (cf. 10:10; 11:6). Paul regards them as “false apostles” (11:1–4) and scornfully calls them “super-apostles” (11:5) because of their boast of superiority. From Paul’s perspective, these men are nothing more than “false apostles . . . masquerading as apostles of Christ” and “servants

[of Satan]" (11:13, 15). Paul tries to show that, as a servant of Christ, he is actually "superior" to the opponents (cf. 11:5, 23).

Fourth, we observe that the intruders were amazingly successful in the Corinthian church. The Corinthian house churches, which had already been wracked by strife and division (1 Cor. 1:10–12), were easy prey for the intruders, who were received with open arms (2 Cor. 11:4, 20) and quickly gained positions of prominence and influence. As a result, the interlopers were able to exact payment from the Corinthians for services rendered (cf. 2:17; 11:20), whereas Paul steadfastly refused to exercise his apostolic right to financial support in Corinth (cf. 1 Cor. 9:1–18). Not to be outdone, the opponents claimed that Paul's refusal was tantamount to admitting he was a fraud, and that in any case his refusal showed a lack of affection for the Corinthians. Caught in the crossfire of such perverse charges, the apostle was forced to defend his actions and to prove his apostolic credentials (cf. 11:5, 7–11; 12:11–15; 13:3, 6). Furthermore, when Paul did endeavor to raise money, not for himself but for Jerusalem (chs. 8–9), the opponents again cast aspersion on his motives, claiming that he was involved in a confidence game (12:16–18). So whatever Paul did—whether he refused money or raised money—the "spin doctors" in Corinth found a way to malign him while magnifying their own stature in the community.

Notes

1. For a recent bibliography of secondary literature on 2 Corinthians, see Victor Paul Furnish, "2 Corinthians," in *Pauline Theology, Vol. II: 1 & 2 Corinthians* (ed. David M. Hay; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), pp. 270–84.

2. On the textual evidence of 2 Corinthians, see the more detailed treatment in the larger exegetical commentaries and in Bruce M. Metzger, ed., *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2d ed.; Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), pp. 505–19. For a theological treatment of the letter, see Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *The Theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

3. For the view that already in 1 Corinthians Paul had to defend his apostleship, see Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*

(NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 4–11; Karl A. Plank, *Paul and the Irony of Affliction* (SBLSS; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), pp. 12–24.

4. On the issues relating to Paul's travel plans in 1 Cor. 16:5–7 and 2 Cor. 1:15–16, see Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, Vol. 1: Introduction and Commentary on II Corinthians I–VII* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), pp. 69–74.

5. On the various suggestions about the offender and his offence, see Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, vol. 1, pp. 61–69.

6. Cf. Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, vol. 1, pp. 57–61.

7. P⁴⁶, an Egyptian papyrus dating to ca. A.D. 200, contains all thirteen chapters of 2 Corinthians. As we shall see, 1 Clement probably attests to the existence of 2 Corinthians already at the end of the first century A.D. Cf. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism* (2d ed.; trans. Erroll F. Rhodes; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 296.

8. On the issue of genre in 2 Corinthians, see, e.g., John T. Fitzgerald, "Paul, the Ancient Epistolary Theorists, and 2 Corinthians 10–13: The Purpose and Literary Genre of a Pauline Letter," in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Festschrift for A. J. Malherbe* (ed. D. L. Balch, et al.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), pp. 190–200.

9. Hans Dieter Betz goes so far as to state that "few scholars continue to defend the unity of 2 Corinthians . . ." ("Corinthians, Second Epistle to the," *ABD*, vol. 1, pp. 1148–54 [here p. 1149]). For a recent survey of the various literary-critical positions, see Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, vol. 1, pp. 3–49; N. H. Taylor, "The Composition and Chronology of Second Corinthians," *JSNT* 44 (1991), pp. 67–87.

10. We also may note a few other correspondences between chs. 1–9 and 10–13 that bind the letter together as a unity. First, certain key terms are used throughout the letter: e.g., "thought, mind" (*noēma*; cf. 2:11; 3:14; 4:14; 10:5; 11:3); "Satan" (2:11; 4:4; 6:15; 11:14; 12:7); Paul's alleged conduct "according to the flesh" (*kata sarka*; cf. 1:17; 10:3); "commend" (*synistanein*; cf. 3:1; 4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 7:11; 10:12, 18; 12:11). Second, the creation/fall tradition (Gen. 1–3) is woven into Paul's letter at various points (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4–6; 5:3, 17; 11:3; 12:4). Third, hyperbolic language is characteristic of 2 Corinthians as a whole (cf. 1:5, 8, 12; 2:4, 7; 3:9, 10; 4:7, 15, 17; 7:4, 13, 15; 8:2, 7, 14; 9:8, 12, 14; 10:8, 15; 12:7, 15). Fourth, Paul's reason for writing a letter rather than coming in person (1:23; 13:10) is stated.

11. The broad outlines given here are based on the detailed discussion in my book, *Paul and the Nations: The Old Testament and Jewish Background of Paul's Mission to the Nations with Special Reference to the Destination of Galatians* (WUNT 84; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995). Cf. also my article, "The Geographical Horizon of Luke: A Confluence of Jewish and Greco-Roman Worlds," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century*

Setting, Vol. 2: The Book of Acts in Its Graeco-Roman Setting (ed. David W. J. Gill and Conrad Gempf; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 483–544.

12. Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography* (London: Burns & Oates, 1979), pp. 6, 8. See also Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas* (3d ed.; New York: Macmillan, 1993), p. 21 (with a map showing the intersection of the three spheres).

13. For a concise summary, see P. W. Barnett, "Opponents of Paul," *DPL*, pp. 644–53. See further C. K. Barrett, *Paul: An Introduction to His Thought* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), pp. 33–38.

14. James D. G. Dunn, "Prolegomena to a Theology of Paul," *NTS* 40 (1994), pp. 407–32 (here p. 417).

15. Despite the difference of tone in 2 Cor. 1–9 and 10–13, both sections of the letter repudiate opponents who commend themselves (3:1; 10:18; cf. 5:12) while maligning Paul as weak, vacillating, and deceitful (1:17; 4:2; 7:2; 10:2, 10; 12:11, 16–17). Hence, the two sections probably have in view the same opponents.

16. If Paul's opponents in Corinth do have letters from the Jerusalem church, then the situation in Corinth can be compared to the conflict in Antioch (Gal. 2:11–14; cf. Acts 15:24). In that case, however, it remains a profound mystery why the Jerusalem apostles repeatedly violated the agreed spheres of apostolic jurisdiction (Gal. 2:1–10) by sending emissaries into Paul's territory in order to gain control of his mission. Nevertheless, Paul seems to imply that the terms of the Jerusalem accord were indeed violated when the intruders overstepped the bounds of their authority (cf. 2 Cor. 10:12–18). Perhaps the answer lies in the possibility that the Jerusalem authorities did not know and could not control all that their emissaries were doing in the field (cf. Barrett, *Paul*, p. 36).