

2 CORINTHIANS 1–7

The following is adapted from Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, forthcoming).

2 Corinthians 1

1:1

Paul's detractors seem to have questioned his authority to direct affairs in the branch and insisted that he was interfering where he should not. It is therefore not surprising that right from his salutation he stressed his God-given authority as an Apostle of Christ Jesus. But he did more. Using that authority, he wrote not just to the Corinthian Saints but also to those "in the whole province of Achaia." His initial act was to pronounce a heartfelt blessing upon the branches that they would enjoy God's grace (2 Corinthians 1:1). That blessing was important because it would be only through the impartation of divine grace that his readers would hear, accept, and act on his counsel. He also yearned that they would feel godly peace, a spiritual condition the divisive congregation desperately needed. Thus, by means of the salutation, he asserted his right to lead the branches and direct affairs there.

As with many of his other epistles, Paul somewhat follows the conventions governing prescripts specifically designed to separate an epistle from an informal letter and mark it as an official communication sent to a specific body of people by one in authority. These prescripts contain the name of the person (in this case, persons) sending the letter, their position, the audience they address, and an appropriate greeting. Paul, however, as shown below, is also careful to nuance his greetings such that they fit his purpose and bolster his theology.

Paul was careful and consistent in calling himself an Apostle commissioned by God. The term *apostle* (ἀπόστολος, *apostolos*) carried no religious nuance in secular Greek. It simply denoted anyone acting in the capacity of a messenger, from a simple courier to a fully invested governmental envoy. Even so, the word always carried the idea of one being sent out to do something and often connoted the authority and accompanying power of the individual or body that did the sending. Its most frequent use in the first century AD referred to a delegate or envoy.

It was the philosophical school of Cynics that gave the term a theological turn. They saw themselves as invested representatives of the divine sent forth to do their god's bidding. Though the term *apostle* may never have become so technical that it denoted exclusive divine authorization, it was nonetheless often associated in such contexts. That is the case with its use in the New Testament, in which it designates those whom Jesus singled out and empowered to carry out His mission.¹ That Paul uses the title for himself shows he fell into this category.

In his greetings, Paul also includes Timothy as a cosender of the epistle (1:1), and this likely indicates why Paul used the plural pronoun *we* in the text a number of times. There has been a good deal of speculation as to why Paul mentioned his companion. These include Paul's effort to give the young man more honor and respect with the Christian community at Corinth or to follow the Old Testament mandate that confirmations must be made by two witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15). That Timothy was the cosender of five other of Paul's epistles suggests that Paul simply wanted to recognize him as his companion who stood with him in ministering to the Saints.

Paul refers to those whom he writes as belonging to "the assembly of God" (*tē ekklisia tou theou*). His words are evidence that he sees no difference between gentile and Jewish congregants. He apparently sees the whole as the true successors of the people of God whom Jehovah Himself designated as Israel. This displays Paul's view that the Church is not a human creation. God is responsible for the gathering of His people, and whether in individual house churches or in smaller groups, the whole comprises the assembly of God.

Paul addresses the letter not just to the Corinthian congregations but also to all those throughout central and southern Greece (1:1). He may have done so because he designed his epistle as a circular letter to be read in the branches throughout the area. It may also be that these branches saw themselves as associated with and under the direction of the Corinthian base and he therefore wanted them to feel included. The epistle's broad reach does suggest that he did see the problems he focuses on as not just affecting the central place but as being endemic to the region.

In the broader Greek culture, the adjective ἅγιος (*hagios*), translated here as "Saints," referred to that which was devoted to the gods and, when applied to people, designated those who dedicated themselves to the service of the divine. They, therefore, belong to the ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*) or "called out group" because they are set apart for God's work.

1:3–7

Paul’s major thrust in this section deals with divine comfort, but he sets it “over against tribulation, suffering, and death.” He identifies his suffering with that of the Lord to emphasize the depth of the comfort he has received from the divine source. It is of note that Paul says not that faithfulness either prevents suffering or takes it away but that because of it the Saint receives comfort and, through it, encouragement from the Father and the Son to stay faithful.

Paul begins this pericope with a beautiful, effusive blessing toward God that emphasizes particularly His position as Father (2 Corinthians 1:3). The Apostle focuses on the aspect of fatherhood that expresses itself in two ways: as the literal father of the Savior and as the figurative father of all mercies (*οἰκτιρμός*, *oiktirmos*), the word denoting a deep sense of compassion, even empathy, for the suffering of another. It is His fatherhood of the first that opens the door to His fatherhood of the second. Indeed, it is because of the saving work of Christ that God’s full mercies can flow to His children. On this stands His role as the “God of all comfort” (3:1), the Atonement opening the way for the Father to exercise His mercy by touching, consoling, and encouraging His tormented child.

By placing mercy and comfort in the genitive mood, Paul does not simply identify two of God’s attributes; he actually discloses God Himself. Mercy and comfort not only belong to God but also define Him—that is, they reveal not only what He is but who He is.

The Apostle nuances the word “mercies” so that it emphasizes the depth of God’s feelings. So deep are they that the suffering of His righteous children brings a strong visceral response. The Father’s answer is to reach out through His Son in merciful comfort. Behind the word translated “comfort” (*παράκλησις*, *parakēsis*) stands the idea of help that is felt as a lifting of the spirit and an endowment of strength. Strongly connected to the word is its result: encouragement through knowing one does not stand alone. Such comfort speaks to the soul.

God’s objective in giving such encouragement is to motivate the recipient to move forward in obedient faith. The basis of that encouragement is Spirit-derived. It is the witness of the Holy Ghost to the soul concerning the truthfulness not only of the gospel message but also of the promise of salvation and eternal felicity that awaits the faithful. The current feeling of strength and comfort that the Saint receives is also the assurance that faithfulness will be rewarded. The result provides the energy to endure life’s trials.

At the time that Paul wrote, the Corinthian Saints were experiencing such trials. Paul does not soft-pedal their feelings of distress. Indeed, his use of the noun *θλίψις* (*thlipsis*), “affliction,” emphasizes the great difficulty of their ordeal. But being a realist, he does put their difficulties in perspective. He understands that such pressure comes from being in a hostile world. For that reason, suffering should be no surprise. Jesus Himself warned His disciples that in this world they would have tribulation but assured them that He had overcome the world (John 16:33). Whether or not Paul knew of this teaching, he and Barnabas were well aware that only through many afflictions could the Saint enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). The Savior Himself was not free of tribulation and in such each Christian joined Him (compare

Philemon 3:10; 1 Peter 4:13). It was this solidarity with the Lord that not only explained why troubles came but also witnessed that they could be endured. By this means a bond was formed between the Savior and the saved.

The suffering Son is central to this section. It is *from* Him that Paul's suffering overflows because He has called Paul to a very painful ministry, but it is also *through* Him that comfort overflows from God. Therefore, Paul could say that the Savior's suffering abounds (*περισσεύω, perisseuō*) to their advantage because it shows that with divine help, deep suffering can be endured and eventually overcome. Thus does their "comfort abound through Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:5).

Paul gives a reason why he and Timothy have and are enduring Christlike suffering: to enable them to strengthen the Christians in theirs by showing that they need not yield to it. And how is that possible? It is due to divine comfort that "abounds through Christ" (1:5). Thus, Paul declares, "If we are comforted, it is for your comfort," for it "produces [your] patient endurance in the same suffering we ourselves endure" (1:7). Thus, the Apostle can declare the utter confidence he has in his hope for their success because he knows that "just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort" and that with the strength that comes from that comfort, they will endure all their antagonists place upon them (1:7).

1:8–9

To illustrate his point that suffering, properly seen, can be redemptive, Paul calls his readers' attention to a most harrowing experience that he and his missionary companions had in the province of Asia. His description of the depth of fear he and his companions felt betrays how terrifying the ordeal really was. His words suggest that they felt a sentence of death had been passed against them (2 Corinthians 1:9).

Just where they were when this happened is unclear. A place of possible intersection is the riot that took place in Ephesus against the Christians (Acts 19:21–41). The problem is, however, that the account in Acts, though showing how intense the near riot was, does not give the impression that Paul's life or anyone else's was in danger, and thus the door is left open to other possibilities. One thing is clear: due to the strength of the hostility generated against Paul, for his safety, the local Church leaders had Paul leave the city. Further, wherever the place was, what is sure is that Paul and his companions despaired of life—that is, they viewed their situation as so desperate that they truly thought they were going to die.

1:10

It is of note that the missionaries' trust did not initially rest on being rescued from the death. Rather, it rested on God's power over it. Thus, these missionaries could have had in mind God's power to resuscitate them so that they could carry on their mission or, more likely, to eventually resurrect them through the power of the Atonement into eternal life and glory. In apparently some miraculous way, God did not allow them to suffer death but rescued them from the terrifying and hopeless situation (2 Corinthians 1:10). By doing so, God turned their condition inside out. Fear and perplexity gave way to a new understanding

and perspective that Paul felt compelled to communicate to his readers. He and his companion came to understand that even when conditions seemed hopeless, God had the power to rescue His people.

1:11

In 2 Corinthians 1:11, Paul does three important things that further assist him in laying down the foundation on which he will build the rest of his epistle. First, he acknowledges the help his readers can give him and his companions as they lift their voices to God in fervent prayer. As they do so, he tacitly reminds them, they actually join God in supporting the missionaries. Second, he enlists their help in the ministry as they join together in thankful prayers to God for what He has done for Paul and others and, by extension, can and will do for all. Such would have a sanctifying effect on them (as it had on the missionaries) as they relied on and glorified God rather than themselves. And finally, he reinforces their alignment with him in his role as an Apostle. Indeed, their response to his request publicly reveals and reinforces that they stand with him.

1:12

Paul begins the pericope that runs from 2 Corinthians 1:12 through 2:13 by bearing a strong witness as to how guilt-free his conscience is when it comes to his dealings with the Saints at Corinth. Indeed, he states that his clear conscience is a source of pride with him. It is grounded on his conduct (*ἀναστρέφω*, *anastrephō*)—that is, his actions following the highest order of ethical behavior. He testifies that these actions were grounded in that kind of holiness and sincerity that is enabled by God and is not based on fallible worldly wisdom.

Indeed, his former (and by extension, present) conduct was filled with the grace of God that authenticates all he did and now does. Paul feels assured that he can stand on his integrity. Though acting according to conscience is his and his companions' general comportment, they exercised it more especially during the times spent at Corinth. The Apostle's not-so-hidden message is, then, that he and his companions stand blameless before God. On this condition—his total feelings of guiltlessness—Paul builds the rest of his defense that continues through chapter 7. In doing so, it is likely he is very deliberately laying the groundwork for his forceful defense against those who had impugned his character and apostolic office.

1:13–14

Based on his integrity, Paul declares to his readers that he has been straightforward in all his correspondence with them. He has never, he assures them, used his writings to hide an agenda or veil a teaching. Because some have read his letters supposing that they contained some veiled material, they have understood neither his intentions, his doctrine, nor his use of authority. As a result, the congregation has had, at best, only a partial understanding of him. He therefore stresses the transparency of his epistles to assure them that they can take at face value what he has and will write them and, through that means, come to understand him more fully.

Because of the propensity of some to misread Paul's material, it appears that the congregation's positive response to his harsh letter may have been more superficial than he desired. They still did not understand his humility and meekness and as a result were vulnerable to the blandishments of the opposition party. Misunderstanding him likely opened the doors for his detractors to misrepresent and thereby twist his intentions, thus gaining disciples to their cause and his hurt. Paul's supporters apparently resisted the attacks. This varied condition would account for his mixed signals (of both joy and anxiety) with which the epistle is loaded concerning these people. His desire, as he states, is to have the Saints through means of this letter more accurately understand him, his motives, and his message. As this happens, hopefully by understanding the content of the present letter, they will come to feel a sense of pride in him just as he expects that he will take pride in them "in the day of the Lord." (2 Corinthians 1:13–14). The reason for this mutual pride will likely be that they can stand up in the Judgment "and testify on each other's behalf to the Lord about how good each has been to and for the other."²

1:15–20

In this pericope, Paul appears to be addressing one of the attacks against his authority and personal commitment to the Corinthian Saints. The point of attack appears to have focused on Paul's not visiting the congregations when he said he would. In the section above, he set up his explanation and defense by noting the purity of both his motives and actions toward the Corinthians in the past and by assuring them that when they fully understood him, he will be a source of pride with them (2 Corinthians 1:12–14). He now explains that his inability to come when promised was not an act of caprice on his part but was necessitated by divine action (1:15–20).

In this section, Paul address one of the attacks that has been made on his character. He had indicated in an earlier epistle that he planned to spend some time with the Corinthian Saints before heading back to Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:2–9). Apparently, his change in itinerary became known to the people and opened the door for his detractors to accuse him of incompetence, caprice, or a lack of care. He begins his defense by stating how confident he is that all his dealing with the Saints have been exemplary (1:15). In short, he has not a shred of guilty conscience regarding his dealings with them. He then confirms that his initial plans were to come to them before proceeding to Macedonia and then, once his work was done there, to return to them before proceeding to Jerusalem (1:16). Unfortunately, he explains, through no fault of his own, his plans had been interrupted.

He assures his readers that he does not base his intentions according to mere human standards. The phrase he uses (*κατὰ σάρκα*, *kata sarka*) refers to human dynamics totally devoid of any spiritual quality. Paul refuses to have his readers believe he leads a godless life, and thus, he categorically denies that the change in his plans shows any fickleness, flaw of character, or lack of inspiration on his part (1:17).

The charge leveled against him was a heavy one. In that culture, vacillation and indecision were condemned, and not keeping one's word was especially looked down on. Since integrity carried a highly

moral component, to default on it denigrated everything else a person did or said. Thus, the attack on Paul was likely designed to make all his teachings suspect. Therefore, it was especially important that he reassure his readers that despite what his antagonists claimed, he did not follow the bad behavior of some who say “absolutely” in one breath and “no way” with the next (1:17).

To bolster his point, Paul swears an oath that relies on the faithfulness of God. In doing so, the Apostle aligns his own integrity with that of the Father (1:18) and by this assures his readers of his own faithfulness. Thus, he is able to shift the responsibility of actions from himself to God and thereby emphasize the lack of capriciousness in them.

To further his case, Paul appeals to the preaching of Christ by Silas, Timothy, and himself. They all acted in concert, witnessing the truthfulness that was centered in one unified message—the integrity of God. With Him there is never vacillation, never a yes and no but always a yes, as seen in the ministry and life of His Son.

With 1:19, Paul launches a rather clever justification for the change in his travel plans. His point is that as God’s word is consistent, so too have Paul’s words been consistent from the beginning of his ministry among the Corinthians. The work and testimonies of Timothy and Silas confirm this is so. No one could contest that these missionaries had brought the gospel to the Corinthians in saving power. They acted as God’s tools, and therefore their word was His word. The tacit message was that as the Father was active in Paul’s life before, He remains active even now. Thus, any and all of Paul’s travel plans, including any changes in his itinerary, have come according to divine direction.

The Apostle continues to stress his point concerning the centrality of Christ making God’s promises sure. As the Apostle says, the promises all find “yes” in Christ, meaning that He fulfills them. When those in the congregation recognize this and give a heartfelt amen, by which they affirm the truth of the doctrine, they express their praise and glorification of God for what He has done (1:20).

The fulfillment of divine promises plays an important role in the theology of Paul. He sees the realization of them as a gift given through God’s grace. God alone has the power to fulfill His word and will do so because He is the “God who does not lie” (Romans 4:21; Titus 1:2). Therefore, God’s promises stand in contradistinction from the law of Moses. That law demanded perfect obedience for salvation, which no one could give (Romans 3:19–20, 23). God’s promises of salvation, on the other hand, rested fully on the Son and demand a person’s faith in Him (Romans 3:21–22). Paul saw that a person’s trust and reliance on Jesus, while striving to keep His commandments, opened a portal to the Father’s grace, and with its reception, justification came (Romans 3:24, 28; 4:16). By thus standing sin-free through faith, the person’s salvation was assured (Romans 5:1–3). For Paul, it was essential that his readers to understand that God’s promises, fulfilled in salvation, have been given an exclusive “yes” through Christ.

1:21–22

Just what Paul’s intent is remains ambiguous. The problem lies in his separation of himself from the community of the Corinthian Saints by the use of *ἡμεῖς* (*hēmas*), “us,” and *ὑμῖν* (*hymin*), “you,” in 2 Corinthians

1:21. Throughout the rest of 1:21–22, he refers only to “us.” His language does not reveal whether he intended to keep the separation going. If he were following his original flow of thought, then “us” would include the whole community. In that case, he would be extracting the maximum value he could from the point he made, thus emphasizing all that the Father had done through the apostolic ministry for the Christian community.

On the other hand, if he were keeping the separation going, then his purpose was defensive, thus stressing the difference between him and the Saints. His purpose was to build up the basis of his own trustworthiness by showing all that the Father had done through him and, by inclusion, all those with apostolic authority. If that is the case, these verses act as a rebuttal to the innuendos of Paul’s detractors. He is thus testifying that he and his companions in the ministry are men of probity and trustworthiness since the Father has given them His Spirit-based seal.

What can be said for sure is that Paul believes that all the faithful can enjoy the strengthening, anointing, and sealing that comes from God and can thereby receive the deposit of the Spirit.

Paul states that God places this assurance or guarantee in a person’s heart. While in modern usage, the heart is the seat of emotion, in this period, the heart connoted the whole spectrum of mental and emotional activities that include all rational elements. Therefore, this assurance is more than a mere emotional tug but is a declaration that touches both the emotional and intellectual level of the soul.

The essence of what Paul is saying in 1:20–22 centers on his use of the verb *σφραγίζω* (*sphragizō*), “to seal.” The term denotes the act of placing one’s signet or monogram on something. Doing so secures for that person the property thus marked. Though the religious and eschatological element (referring to the assurance of eternal life) lie behind this idea and therefore cannot be ignored, it does not stand center stage in this case. Paul’s point is that “by the Spirit, who is the foretaste and down payment of what God has promised to give believers, the Corinthians Christians have been claimed as God’s property. They belong to him.”³

1:23

Working to drive home the reason why he changed his travel plans, Paul makes what amounts to a solemn oath, invoking God as his witness. The verb he uses, *ἐπικαλέω* (*epikaleō*), “to call,” carries strong civil and religious overtones. It connotes calling upon a higher authority to verify a fact or position. Paul’s calling upon God to do so shows his absolute sureness of his position, for as the scriptures make clear, God knows the “reins and the heart”—that is, He knows everything about a person, including their most inner secrets.⁴ So certain is Paul of his position that in taking the oath, he puts his own life on the line. By means of such a solemn declaration, the Apostle assures his readers of the truthfulness of what he is about to say. He likely designed this rather bold act to have a considerable sobering effect upon his audience.

Having made his declaration, Paul gives the major reason why he adjusted his travel plans (2 Corinthians 1:23). He had already caused some of these people quite a bit of grief due to both their initial support

of one of his major antagonists and his harsh letter. Further, when he did come, he would have to confront and likely discipline any that weren't doing what they should be. He was hoping that by biding his time he could give them a chance to repent and determine where they stood with him. The question was then not about the purpose or appropriateness of his visit but about its timing.

Paul's words do raise a question: how can he say that he wants to spare the Saints pain but deny any intent to lord it over them? The answer is likely because what he wants to spare them from is specifically the need for apostolic reproof and correction, albeit even here he would use "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (10:1–2; 13:2). His objective is not, however, to dictate, demand, or impose faithfulness and trust in Christ. Indeed, Paul fully understands that true faith in the Lord can neither be coerced nor result from fear.

1:24

The Apostle wants his readers to encourage and gladden his heart, but that could not happen if Paul's actions among them only resulted in further hurt and alienation. By waiting, Paul believes they will get their house fully in order such that when he does come, they will all share in a common joy because they now stand firm in the covenant.

2 Corinthians 2

2:1–4

Attacks against Paul's character and conduct seem to have suggested that his actions were based on capriciousness. These occurrences pushed Paul to explain as fully as possible why he made changes to his travel plans that no longer included Corinth as his first stopping point (2 Corinthians 2:1–4). In these verses, he explains that his major reason was to avoid exacerbating the tension and suffering that had been running high in the branches. He assures his readers that he had carefully thought through his decision (*κρίνω*, *krinō*) and determined that his delay in visiting them would be the best for all. The reason was his fear that a premature visit would once again produce sorrow or mental distress (*λύπη*, *lypē*). He stresses that his desire was to wait until he heard how the congregations had reacted to his harsh letter. Once he knew that, he would decide what to do next. He was well aware that some of his readers could have viewed the harshness of his letter as indicating malice toward them. To drive that point home, Paul asks, "Who would cheer me up?" and concludes, "Certainly not the person who was grieved on my account" (2:2). In doing so he reveals that his joy is dependent on how they feel toward him.

Paul notes that he wrote the former letter, though harsh, in the hopes of bringing about a reconciliation. Indeed, their grief was his grief, and conversely, their joy would be his joy. The word Paul uses to express his feelings (*εὐφραίνω*, *euphrainō*) denotes happiness and joy that is made all the stronger by being shared by a community of believers. At the time he is writing this epistle, he feels this condition

has indeed been realized. For that reason, he can write in full confidence (*πειθῶ, peithō*) that they all share the same feelings and, as a result, will accept what he now tells them (2:3).

Paul feels the necessity of letting his readers know the depth of agony he felt as he wrote the harsh letter. To do so he uses three very intense expressions: the experience was gut-wrenching (*θλίψις, thlipsis*), heartbreaking (*συνοχῆς καρδίας, synochēs kardias*), and executed with a flood of tears (2:4). His purpose, he insists, was not to cause further sorrow (*λυπέω, lypeō*) but rather in the hope that the Saints would recognize that despite their harshness, his words would expose the exceeding (*περισσοτέρως, perissoterōs*) love he had for them. Tacitly, he is noting that like God, he rebukes those whom he loves.

2:5

For the first time, if obliquely, Paul reveals the seat of the problem he faced before and during his quick trip to Corinth. That problem centered on the activities of a certain someone (*τις, tis*) whom Paul does not name but who generated much of the grief that initially went around. It seems likely that this person was the one who headed the local opposition against the Apostle, challenging his authority and doctrine.

Paul assures his readers that he recognizes that not only he but also the whole branch been hurt by this person's attack. Indeed, the discord that the offender sowed hurt nearly everyone. It brought sincere sorrow to some once they realized how deeply he had driven the wedge between Paul and the people.

2:6

This passage illustrates Paul's magnanimity. He does not name the individual and through this act of kindness shows his desire to continue not only the man's but also the branch's healing process. The censure imposed on the individual by the majority of the branch, having done what it was intended for either in intensity or duration, met its goal. Thus, Paul not only insists that no more punishment is needed but also that the man should be fully taken care of and encouraged to keep the commandments.

In addition to the one above, Paul likely intends to send another message, this one to the minority who had originally sided with the individual. This more tacit message is that Paul's chief interest is not that of punishment but of unity within the Christian community under apostolic leadership.

2:7

To help the community heal, Paul admonishes his readers to care for the individual. The verb he uses (*χαρίζομαι, charizomai*) means "to bestow favors or gifts," but it also carries the idea of a gracious and caring attitude given freely that results in full acceptance and unity.

But Paul asks for even more. He wants the Saints to reach out and encourage (*παρακαλέω, parakaleō*) the individual. The idea behind the word is to give that which will heal, lift, and inspire him to repent. Thus, the forgiven one would be fortified "in heart, mind, and soul." By extending such sincere kindness to him, any residual resistance on his part would likely be overcome, and full fellowship established. This

is exactly the condition Paul wants. The Apostle, however, wants even more. Because the demands of repentance have been met, continuing the punishment might cause the person to end up drowning (*καταπίνω*, *katapinō*) in a sea of grief, an act that would be both unfortunate and inappropriate. Once repentance has done its work, further discipline would be nothing less than punitive.

2:8

Paul asks his readers to respond in love (2:8). “For Paul, [love] is not an ethereal concept but is a concrete reality fully expressed in the teachings and actions of the Master. It is neither a sweet sentiment nor even some motivational power behind certain actions. For him, it is action; nothing less will do. Where inaction resides, love does not. As such, love [*ἀγάπη*, *agape*] is neither a human virtue inherent within the soul nor a talent developed by discipline and hard work. It is *the* touch of the divine.”⁵ It is this kind of love Paul wants his readers to extend to the once-offender. And there is good reason. He must not only be forgiven but also raised to his former position of respect. The reason is that to punish the person without healing him would make everyone lose in the end.

2:9

The Apostle admits that he writes in order to test the Saints and see if they will do as he requests. Since many had been hurt by the offender (2 Corinthians 2:5), the Apostle’s request is a good test to see if they will accept Paul and follow his example in forgiving the man. But the test goes further, for they must show a willingness to follow apostolic authority “in all things” (*εἰς πάντα*, *eis panta*).

On the other hand, Paul’s insistence on full fellowship reveals he is not a bit interested in demonstrating any kind of victory, and thus dominance, over the man but rather cares about the well-being of the Church as a whole. No lingering bitterness is to canker the soul of the congregation.

2:10

Paul has already enjoined forgiveness for the sake of the offender to prevent him from becoming overwhelmed by excessive sorrow (2 Corinthians 2:7). Now he does so for the sake of the branch members (2:10). He constructs this sentence in way that downplays his own role in the forgiveness process and elevates the role of his readers. What they forgive, he says, he will also forgive. He assures them that any forgiveness on his part has been for their sake, and he emphasizes the sincerity of his position by stating he has done so as if the Savior Himself were present as witness (*ἐν προσώπῳ Χριστοῦ*, *en prosōpō Christou*).

The passage shows that Paul understands Church discipline as a sincere expression of both love and grace. It demands accountability and change leading to a more Christ-centered life. Those who mistakenly see grace as only an act of forgiveness miss its real substance and purpose. It is not an escape from confronting an injured soul guilty of blatant and public sin. It is rather the means by which that soul can be healed and transformed. Paul clearly shows that grace demands not only forgiveness on the part of the

offended but also reformation on the part of the offender. Seeking revenge on one who has truly repented of their sins and seeks forgiveness betrays an unmerciful and hardened character itself very much in danger of judgment.

2:11

The Apostle states that he has forgiven everyone of everything, albeit the repentant offender stands in the foreground. Paul stresses that he has done so as a necessary foil against Satan's designs and purposes (*νόημα, noēma*) that are aimed at outwitting (*πλεονεκτέω, pleonekteō*) the Saints and bringing them under his spell (2 Corinthians 2:10). Paul is well aware of the adversary's tactics, especially of his desire to destroy the Church (see 2 Thessalonians 2:9–10). Through the power of forgiveness, Paul works to guard against a number of possible attacks by Satan. If all had a forgiving heart, he understands, it would hinder the minority (those who had sided with the offender) from retaining hard feelings and would thus open the way to full unity with the majority as well as with Paul himself. It would also help individuals, as the Apostle notes elsewhere, remain reconciled to one another and thus protect them from returning to "the dominion of darkness" from which they had been rescued and brought "into the kingdom of [God's] beloved Son through whom [they] have redemption and the forgiveness of sin" (Colossians 1:13–14, authors' translation).

2:12

Paul is clear that the hand of the Lord was involved in his movements. It was God who opened a door for the Apostle to accomplish a certain mission and he responded to it.

Unfortunately, Paul does not say what that mission was. He states simply that he came "for the sake of the gospel of Christ and a door had been opened for me by the Lord" (2 Corinthians 2:12). His words can be taken in at least two ways depending on how one takes the connective *καί (kai)*, "and." Most scholars interpret it simply as connecting two ideas: that Paul came to Troas *and*, or perhaps, *because* the Lord opened the door for him to proclaim the gospel. Taken thus, the Apostle came under inspiration to Troas for the purpose of preaching the gospel and found a very warm reception among many people living in the area. In this view, though the labor was moving with success, Paul was so anxious that Titus had failed to meet him that he forsook the work to find his companion.

It is not difficult to read the text this way, but the idea that he came to Troas because the Lord had opened the way for him to preach the gospel in the area is reading words into the text that are not there. It is possible that the connective *kai*, "and," could be used in the continuative sense, connecting the two events in a consecutive way. Read in this way, Paul was at Troas already *and then* the Lord provided an opportunity for him to move on to Macedonia. Thus, the Apostle was not shirking his duty as a missionary but following the Lord's lead.

2:13

The frustration Paul faced in not meeting with Titus may have been due to climate. During the winter, sea passage was very dangerous. Between October and March, few ships would venture out under the treacherous conditions stirred by the Mediterranean winds and waters. It may be that Paul found a way of getting to Macedonia much earlier than he had anticipated. Thus, the “open door” he refers to was a way of crossing the Aegean Sea to Macedonia so he could search for Titus while engaging in the work there. In that case, his anxiety was due both to the opportunity to further the work and to find his companion. Certainly, the glowing report he records concerning the churches in that area suggests that the ministry there was proving fruitful (2 Corinthians 8:1–4). Whatever the case, Paul said goodbye to his fellow Saints in Troas and headed for Macedonia.

2:14–15

At this point, the Apostle stops his narrative and does not return to it until 2 Corinthians 7:5. Rather, he takes time to rhapsodize on the effects of the gospel on its hearers and to explain his own ministry in light of the power of the word. This rather abrupt break has led some commentators to posit that this portion of the epistle is an insertion added by a later redactor. A close reading, however, shows how this examination of the power and purpose of gospel and Paul’s faithful ministering therein integrates purposefully into the Apostle’s overall theme and self-defense.

The Apostle draws his readers’ attention away from the anxiety-filled account of his travels to the success of the gospel by appealing to the imagery of the *pompa triumphalis*, a very elaborate parade that celebrated the success of a Roman general and drew crowds of thousands. Among the items exhibited in the parade were spectacular spoils of war and important captives. Before the proud general came a large number of men having censers burning with sweet smelling spices and frankincense, while bringing up the rear of the parade were the victorious troops. These herded the defeated captives before them, some on their way to execution.

Paul shows God as the triumphator, but not separate from Jesus. They are victorious together. This is an important point, for though God leads the procession, He does so with Christ. It is this image of covictor that constitutes the special knowledge of Christ that Paul wishes to present. But God does more than enjoy praise with his Son; He manifests the gospel—meaning victory through Jesus—as a sweet aroma that wafts everywhere. Here is where the missionaries come in; they act as His agents.

But what role do the missionaries play in the imagery of the grand parade? It could be that the Apostle sees himself and his companions as captives being led in God’s triumphal procession carrying the embarrassment of being public spectacles and bearing the full brunt of social shame. Because he frequently applies the label of “slave” (*δοῦλος*, *doulos*) as well as that of a prisoner of war to himself, this view seems well taken.⁶

However, the feel of the whole section suggests the Apostle sees neither himself nor his fellow missionaries as defeated and disgraced but rather as fellow triumphators sharing fully in God’s victory. Indeed,

God uses them in the role of the incense bearers that spread the aroma of victory everywhere. The Apostle notes that from God's point of view, the missionaries themselves are the ones who bear the sweet fragrance of Christ and carry it to others.

2:15–16

The odor, though the same for all, has a very different effect on those who smell it. The imagery of the parade would dramatize not only the defeat of the prisoners of war on their way to execution but also their death. To them the scent would be awful. For the victorious on their way to great reward and renown it would indicate not only their success but also their triumph. To them the aroma would be the sweetest of fragrances.

In a less metaphorical sense, to the intractably unbelieving and resolute apostate, the word of Christ not only carries the stench of death but also acts as a poison to bring it on. To the faithful and believing, it is the fragrance that not only bespeaks of an ever-increasing abundance of life but also acts as a life-giving force. The Apostle's imagery shows vividly not only how the gospel divides people, demanding as it does some kind of response, but also the gospel's inherent power to bring life or death.

2:17

Paul compares himself to a peddler but not of the mundane sort. He is, indeed, no mere merchant of worldly items, for his wares have spiritual consequences and, as he has already pointed out, can be either harmful or beneficial depending on the spiritual state of those who hear him. He castigates those who “peddle the word of God for profit” (2 Corinthians 2:17). There were, as the Apostle notes, “many” (*οἱ πολλοί, hoi polloi*) who were guilty of doing so. This practice would likely open the door to, in Latter-day Saint parlance, the practice of priestcraft. This enterprise carries a very grave danger, for “priestcrafts are that men preach and set themselves up for a light unto the world, that they get gain and praise of the world” (2 Nephi 26–29). These people care nothing for the truth and are therefore willing to say whatever is necessary and thereby adulterate the word of God in order to get profit from the lazy, sinful, and gullible.

Paul concludes this section by tacitly addressing one of the main charges his antagonists have brought against him. Their claim is that he is not an Apostle because he refuses to accept patronage. His primary motive, they apparently insist, was to secretly bilk the Saints out of money through his appeal for assistance to the Jerusalem poor. As such, they claimed, he was a dishonest schemer unlike themselves. They were perfectly willing to accept support, and further, they had letters to authenticate their authority.

The Apostle sets himself and his coworkers apart from these men who are most willing to preach the gospel for hire. Paul insists that he and the other missionaries work from a “pure motive,” being, as they are, “men of God” (2 Corinthians 2:17). To stress the point of the purity of their motives, he uses the very strong phrase “according to God's judgment” (*κατέναντι θεοῦ, katenanti theou*). By this means, the Apostle sets the foundation for his defense on which he will build starting in chapter 3.

2 Corinthians 3

3:1–3

The question at issue here is what constitutes a legitimate Christian ministry. What does it mean to “speak in Christ before God as men of pure motive, as men of God”? (2 Corinthians 2:17). What is at stake is Paul’s legitimacy as an Apostle but, more broadly, the legitimacy of apostolic authority in general. Who has the right to preside over the Church? In his defense, what Paul does here is reestablish the rules of presidency and thereby show who is able to govern with presiding and thereby legitimate authority. Paul insists on a divine, not human, criterion that is dependent not on the judgment of the branches but on the authority of the risen Lord, the power of the Spirit, and the discernment it brings. To push his point, at places throughout the rest of the epistle, he admits to the physical weaknesses his adversaries accuse him of but then shows that such weakness does not disqualify his apostolic authority. Rather his authority is confirmed by the profound spiritual change in the hearts of his converts (3:2). Not backing away from this point, Paul is not a bit afraid of either commending himself and his companions or boasting about what he has been able to do through divine help.

He unabashedly admits that he is once again commending himself but seems to be asking why he has to go through the whole process once more since he had already cleared that hurdle without the need for letters of reference (3:1). It is little wonder that he felt put out. He was, after all, their spiritual father—God’s appointed Apostle—who brought them the word of salvation (1 Corinthians 4:14–15). His magnanimity is shown by his willingness to once again present his case in order to reestablish their mutual trust.

Part of what drives him is his detractors’ castigation of his authority and teachings. They apparently do so on the basis of their own supposed authority bolstered by letters of recommendation. Just who produced these letters is unknown, but they seem to have been derived from a branch or branches that the Corinthian Saints held in respect. It would have been easy for new members to give deference to those who were long-time members.

A problem with these letters of endorsement is that one branch might unknowingly perpetuate false doctrine innocent of any deception. If Church authorities were unable to correct such doctrines, as seems to have been the case with the early Church, then false teachings could become the norm, forcing out the truth. Paul fought hard against this possibility.

In this portion of his epistle, Paul produces his own letter of recommendation (3:2). He does this though his converts whom he feels are the best evidence of his power and validity as an Apostle of Christ. His words express his high admiration for and also the importance of the truly converted. Their love and good works demonstrate not only the power of the gospel but also validate the integrity of the Apostle. Thus, the lives of the disciples commend the Apostle more than any mere letter no matter by what authority it may have been written. By noting that the letter is inscribed (*ἐνγράφω*, *engraphō*) on our hearts, Paul expresses the closeness, even intimacy, that he and his companions feel toward these Saints. The imagery implies that he carries his love for these people everywhere he goes.

Paul further notes that though the letter is written on his heart, it is not hidden there. He demonstrates it so that it is known and read by everyone who is willing to give it a glance. The apostolic power of the ministry is both ongoing and transparent for all to see and enjoy if they will. Since letters were commonly read aloud, the imagery suggests the public nature of Paul's ministry. Nothing is hidden and all is made known, and thus the gospel can be understood for what it truly is.

Paul is certain that for those who will see, the lives of his converts are the only letters of recommendation that he needs. The living God has written, as it were, their names on Paul's heart by the power of His Spirit (3:3). However, "given the disloyalty, fickleness, and waywardness evident within the messianic community in Corinth" his assertion is quite remarkable.⁷ Nonetheless, it seems fully genuine. God's spirit has moved upon him to such an extent that he has a deep love for these people and wants only the best for them, even if it means they must endure a sound scolding.

This medium stands in contrast to the law of Moses, which was written on tablets of stone and unfortunately brought no life to those who would not internalize it. The new law is at its seat internal and life changing. Paul's imagery echoes that of Jeremiah 31:33 in which the prophet looked to a day when the Lord would "make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers. . . . After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people." In Paul's case, it is not God's laws but the names of the converts that are written on the hearts of the missionaries.

3:4

To counter any suggestion that what the Apostle has said in this section of his letter (2 Corinthians 2:14–3:3) shows an arrogance on his part (after all, he is claiming a partnership with God), the Apostle explains the source and basis of his confidence (*πεποιθήσις, pepoithēsis*) and competence (*ικανότης, ikanotēs*). He gives an unflinching testimony that the whole of his ministry relies on and is derived from Christ (3:4). He is the very basis of Paul's confidence in all that the Apostle does and says. Further, the Lord gives the enabling power that Paul uses to push forward the work. However, though the Savior is the immediate agent working with the Apostle, there is one greater who stands behind the Lord and of whom Paul is constantly aware. This is the Father. Paul's affirmation that everything he does is directed "towards God" (*πρὸς τὸν θεόν, pros ton theon*) stresses his acute awareness that he must act according to the Father's will. There is also here a tacit message to his detractors concerning the source and authenticity of his ministry.

3:5

In 2 Corinthians 3:5, Paul answers the rhetorical question he asked in 2:16: "And who is qualified for these things?" The question is a good one, and the Apostle's reflections captured in 3:1–3 have only served to accentuate its importance. Paul's answer to the question given in 3:3–4 is emphatic: only those whom God qualifies. Paul's point is that being aware of this qualification, neither he nor his companions

would or could even think that they were somehow responsible for their successes. Further, his statement that all he does is directed “towards God” (*πρὸς τὸν θεόν, pros ton theon* [3:4]) reveals his awareness of his own insufficiency in carrying out the work of the all-sufficient Father. The effect on Paul is a deeply felt humility. This attitude placed him in direct contrast with the self-aggrandizing and self-competent detractors that were making a show among the Corinthian Saints. His heartfelt attitude, however, does not leave him dubious about his ministry and the authority that stands behind it. Due to his call and station as an Apostle of the Savior, he has full confidence (*πεποίθησις, pepoithēsis*) that his qualifications (*ικανότης, hikanotēs*) are from God, and from this he will not back down even in the face of strong opposition.

3:6

Paul and his party, unlike his detractors, are “new-covenant ministers.” In 2 Corinthians 3:6, he confesses to his readers that of himself he is not adequate for such a ministry, but he and his companions have been made so (*ικανόω, hikanōō*) by God. Paul’s continual use of the word “minister” (*διάκονος, diakonos*) and its cognates throughout the epistle helps him stress this point. The word in its present context carries the idea of official service performed by a representative of the Lord. This service is based on the new, not the old, covenant. The focus of the word is on the service performed, not on the social relationship between the person being served and the one doing the service. Paul seems to have used it to define the entire work encapsulated in the new covenant.

By stressing the need for service, Paul is pushing, if not breaking, social norms. Among the Greeks, service carried little dignity. Even among many of the Jews at the time, the unconditional command to love and serve others had dissolved into meaninglessness. Such an exclusivist and unloving attitude runs contrary to the tenets of the new covenant. The doctrine of the Savior reached back to the Old Testament command that God’s people love and serve one another, and Jesus, the undisputed Master of all, set the example by being the servant of all (Luke 22:24–27). This was the very heart of the new covenant.

3:7–11

The problem Paul faced is largely due to the continuing tendencies of Jewish converts to cling to Mosaic practices and promulgate the importance of the law of Moses. It is possible that this section contains an implicit polemic Paul launched against his detractors. These men could have been using Moses and the glory that fell upon him when he received the old covenant as a model of spirituality and proper ministry. The imagery of the splendor that rested on the Mosaic law stood in contradistinction to the supposed inglorious ministry of Paul and his associates. This view, however, is weakened because there is no concrete evidence in the letter itself that the Apostle had his detractors in mind.

Based on the context, the Apostle is pushing the abundant adequacy of his ministry and the openness with which he proclaims it rather than indirectly bashing his critics (2 Corinthians 3:5, 12). That being the case, his purpose in writing this section is to portray the authentic nature of his ministry through a

vigorous defense of his authority and doctrine. His focus is, therefore, less on the contrast between the old and new covenants and more on the difference of the ministration between them.

The Apostle forcefully sets up this portion of his argument by using very vivid language.

He calls the application of the Mosaic law the “ministry of death” carved in stone. He also describes it as the “ministry of condemnation” (3:7–8). In doing so, he paints a very low picture of Israel’s response to the offices, duties, and functions of the old covenant.

Paul begins his argument by noting that the condemning and deadly ministry came with splendor as evidenced by the glory that radiated from Moses’s face. To stress his point, Paul then uses a rhetorical device known as *qal wāḥômer*, which is basically a fortiori argument that emphasizes an idea by stressing that if a minor point, *x*, is important, then the major point, *y*, must be all the more important. In the present context, *x* (a position on which all the Saints likely agreed) was that Moses exhibited a wondrous glory when he came down from Sinai while *y* (the point Paul wishes to make) is that the new ministry, attended as it is by the Holy Spirit, has a glory that eclipses that which was once upon Moses (3:7–8).

Paul refers to the restored order with the fulness of the gospel and priesthood as “the ministry of the spirit.” The phrase emphasizes a major difference between the old and new covenants—namely, the restored and dynamic work of the Spirit now active among the faithful. It would be wrong, however, to see Paul as contrasting the letter (γράμμα, *gramma*) against the Spirit (πνεῦμα, *pneuma*) such that the letter counts for nothing and the Spirit for all. The problem, as Paul views it, is that Israel could not keep the law without the enabling power of the Spirit to attend them. The Ten Commandments, along with the other statutes and ordinances, were clear enough and the Apostle sees no antagonism between their meaning and that of the intent of the Spirit. But the problem was that the letter separated from the Spirit, given fallen human nature, resulted not in life-giving obedience but in death-dealing disobedience. The Christian under the new covenant, therefore, must have both the law and the Spirit. This is because the letter without the Spirit leads not only to legalism but also, more importantly, to a deadening effect on its adherence. The Spirit without the letter may bring life, but not necessarily in the way it ought to be lived.

In 3:7–8, the Apostle uses two nuances of the word “glory” (δόξα, *doxa*) to make his point. The noun could refer either to splendor and brilliance or to honor and esteem. Paul uses it initially in a scriptural context to describe Moses’s countenance as he came down from Sinai (Exodus 34:29–3). The splendor radiated from the prophet with such brilliance that the Israelites could look at him only with discomfort. Paul uses the second nuance in relationship to the ministry of the law to illustrate the preliminary high esteem or honor it was supposed to have had.

In 3:9, Paul skillfully contrasts two words: “condemnation” (κατάκρισις, *katakrisis*) and “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη, *dikaiosynē*). Both have forensic force, the first denoting an act that demands censure and conviction while the latter denotes the positive result of divine judgment. The contrast helps him point out the difference between the old and new ministrations. The new age, Paul declares, overflows or is extremely rich (περισεύω, *perisseuō*) in glory. Such glory the old ministry never achieved because,

as he notes, it was suppressed by the veil Moses had to wear, which therefore limited its glory to Moses alone. Not so in the new age. Under the indwelling of the Spirit during this ministration of righteousness, heavenly power involved every person who came actively into the new covenant and infused each with divine access and the rule of righteousness that flowed therefrom (3:17). Paul admits that currently it is inward and unseen by the spiritually myopic but is expressing itself in the message delivered by the Apostles and in the lives of those who receive the gospel (3:18).

He next asks in 3:9, to paraphrase, “If the dispensation of death came with glory, will not the dispensation of life be attended with a much greater glory?” He then testifies that the new ministry, one of righteousness, far outshines the ministry of condemnation. Indeed, in contrast to the immense glory of the new dispensation, the old one actually had no splendor at all (3:10).

Paul’s point is that the glory associated with the restored ministry is better than that of the old for two reasons: first, the initial ministry brought condemnation while the latter brings righteousness, and second, the former had only a glint that vanished away while the latter has a splendor that will abide forever (3:9, 11).

3:12–18

The major thrust of Paul’s intent in 2 Corinthians 3:12–18 is to explain both his and the other missionaries’ audacious and open-faced proclamation of the gospel to all who will listen in contrast to Moses’s veiled face when he spoke with the congregation of Israel (Exodus 34:33).

To further his point, the Apostle turns from his focus on the great difference between the glory of the Mosaic and current ministries to an examination of the implications in the story of Moses’s interaction with the children of Israel (Exodus 34:29–35). According to the Exodus account, when the people saw Moses they were consternated because his countenance radiated with divine glory. Due to their discomfort in having to endure that radiance, Moses hid the glory by putting a veil over his face when working with the people. However, he took it off when he went into the tabernacle and stood before Jehovah. From Paul’s perspective, these acts had important theological significance. The first act prevented the Israelites from seeing, due to their continuous rebellion, the completion of what was even then becoming inoperative—namely, the power of the old covenant (2 Corinthians 3:13). In short, the veil represented Moses’s judgment against hardhearted Israel. His act symbolized his cutting off or refusing this recalcitrant people direct access to their God and the fullness of his covenant. The second act, removing the veil, showed that Moses could still personally commune directly with God and receive His word, thus showing that such a close and personal relationship was possible for any who would be as the prophet (Exodus 33:9, 11).

Unfortunately, as the Apostle laments in 3:14–15, the problem of the veil’s effects remained among the hardhearted of the Jews even though the gospel is now being preached. The veil metaphorically continued to cover the Jews’ hearts as they read Moses’s words. The stubborn persistence of the problem was due to their refusal to accept Christ. Therefore, they could not see that the ministry of the old covenant was being annulled and replaced by the new. In sum, the totality of the old system was coming to an end (*τέλος*,

telos), but the Jews were blind to the fact that the old law had had its day and was being discontinued. The glory of the old covenant as a means of procuring a more holy life had become inoperative and would remain so. The only way to lift the veil was to accept the Savior and the new covenant.

In 3:16, the Apostle insists that whenever a person accepts Jesus as the divine Son of God, the separating barrier (symbolized by the veil) is taken away. When he states in verse 18 that “we all . . . behold in a mirror the glory of the Lord,” he is emphasizing the effect of the veil’s removal. Each convert can see and enjoy the reflected and beautiful glory like that revealed in the countenance of Moses. As a result, the Saints all share the common salvation brought by the force of the new covenant. Of this fact Paul is the unapologetic and almost brazen bearer. Three spiritually powerful events stand at the heart of the Apostle’s boldness: first, the Spirit’s lifting the veil from off the hearts of the converts, second, the converts’ ability to see the new covenant with its attending ministry for what it is, and finally, their experience with the transforming effects in their lives.

The result is, as Paul notes in 3:17, freedom (*ἐλευθερία, elytheria*). For Paul, such freedom does not refer to some psychological or intellectual state that detaches one from sin, suffering, and death. The Apostle understands that he and his fellow Saints are, due to Christ, suffering in abundance. No, freedom does not mean being autonomous or unfettered from all bonds. It consists, rather, of being freed of the Mosaic law and the heavy restrictions it placed upon the observant.

But there is more to it than that. “Freedom from” carries with it the force of “freedom to.” The new freedom is one of communion. It is freedom to hear and act directly with the Savior through the ministration of the Spirit conveyed via the new covenant. Further, Paul sees this freedom as expanding beyond service to God to include service to neighbors and friends whom the Christian is now open to freely serve.

One aspect of that freedom Paul details in 3:18. Through the transforming power of the “spirit of the Lord” that is now operating upon the believers, the person is changed (*μεταμορφόω, metamorphoō*), by degrees, into Christlike glory. Paul’s theology shows that he fully accepted the idea of theosis—that a person really can become like God.

2 Corinthians 4

Overview

In the first portion of this chapter (4:1–6), Paul continues to answer the question he asked in 2:16 about who is qualified to preach the word and explain the works of God. At this point, however, he adds elements to his argument to answer charges made by his antagonists, especially their insistence that he has insincere motives in preaching the gospel. To make a defense of his integrity and to push his main argument further, the Apostle has his readers consider elements in the epistle that rest upon the solid foundation he has been laying since 2:14. In doing so, he forces them to focus on the striking pieces that showcase authentic ministry and illustrate his personal integrity in preaching the gospel. This allows him to

describe afresh the mission that Christ has given him. Before, in 3:4–18, he presented his labors in light of “the communication of the Spirit,” but now he emphasizes God’s saving work as He moves through the Apostle and his missionary companions to affect the broader mission to the world.

4:1

Paul has already alluded to the great difficulties his ministry has imposed upon him (2 Corinthians 1:4), most notably the near-death experience he had in the Roman Province of Asia. But his trials did not end there. He experienced additional problems, evidenced in his strained relationship with various branches of the Church and especially those in Corinth (2:1–10). These, coupled with his concern for his fellow missionaries (2:12–13), constantly pressed upon him. However, as he states in 4:1, despite all the hardships and suffering, he did not give up. Given all that he had endured, it is amazing that the temptation to ease up, pull back, or leave the mission never seems to have touched him. His forthrightness to Christ’s cause, therefore, evidences the powerful effect that the Messiah’s mercy has had upon him. Due to the expression of such divine love and grace, he insists he cannot turn his back on his Savior or even slack in his work. Indeed not, for by fearlessly and indefatigably pushing forward he expresses his thanks to his Lord (4:1). Thus, he gives continual diligence to spreading and defending God’s message. His conversion experience may have motivated him in an additional way. Due to the mercy he received, he could hope that his converts would also receive the same.

4:2

As clearly shown in 2 Corinthians 4:2, Paul rests his defense on the openness and candor of his preaching. Based on the textual evidence, it is clear that suspicion has fallen upon him. Based on what he said earlier, the initial opposition rested on at least two factors: his refusal to receive support from certain Corinthians and his failure to visit the congregations when promised (1:15–22; 12:15–18). This section of the epistle suggests that Paul’s enemies have now opened up an additional line of attack, one that questions the authenticity of God’s working through him. By taking this tack, his detractors are able to throw doubt on his insistence that he exercises the power of Christ. This line of attack then is not so much on Paul’s person as it is on his legitimacy as God’s spokesman. Paul knows that the question of his divine acceptability cannot be answered through human judgment (1 Corinthians 4:1–5). However, his legitimacy stands on his integrity and therefore he must, at all costs, defend that. Thus he insists that he and the other missionaries have “renounced the shameful hidden things” and have practiced neither deception nor distortion of the word of God (2 Corinthians 4:2).

That Paul uses the verb “commend” (*συνίστημι, synistēmi*) eight times in this epistle suggests its importance for his purpose in writing this letter. The primary denotation of the word is that of building personal relationships through trust. Paul’s personal commendation before God to the Saints is his public proclamation of gospel truths (4:2). He does nothing behind closed doors or through hiding the truth by twisting the

word of God. In dealing with the idea of commendation, whether through one's own efforts or that of another, Paul exposes his self-awareness of his authentic work as a servant (*δοῦλος*, *doulos*—literally, “slave”) of Christ. His knowledge leaves him totally without concern or need for the commendation of others either for the establishment or retention of his reputation. Thus, he refuses to compare himself with them.

4:3–4

In 2 Corinthians 4:3, Paul centers his attention on the inhibiting effects of a spiritual veil that prevents people from seeing that which he calls “our gospel.” Paul’s reference to “our gospel” suggests he is separating the gospel he and his companion preach from another gospel (Galatians 1:6). It seems likely that his adversaries are claiming that the reason “his gospel” is not understood or more fully accepted can be largely laid at his feet. Their line of attack includes at least two possibilities: first, that his form of the gospel is either too obscure or foreign for anyone to really understand or, second, that his personal bodily weakness and independent lifestyle hindered the message. If either of these is the case, then “his gospel” would certainly have stood in contrast to the “different gospel” his detractors are advocating (2 Corinthians 11:4).

Paul denies the charge that either his message or his person is responsible for people not understanding the gospel. For one reason, as his use of the phrase “our gospel” shows, he is not alone in preaching a given understanding of Jesus and His message. Thus, he can insist that he has and is laying bare before the consciences of the people and before God the truthfulness of the divine message. So why has it not been better received?

Paul supplies the answer in 4:4: because it is hidden. This concealment has been made possible by two circumstances: first, the spiritual condition of those who refuse his message and, second, the work of the “god of this world.” His point is that if either one of these is the case, he should not be blamed. The god of this world, though the primary agent who has the power to keep people blind to the gospel, does not work alone. As the Apostle will show (11:14–15), the evil one’s work is proclaimed and intensified by his servants—namely, Paul’s detractors.

Paul’s use of the noun “mind” (*νόημα*, *noēma*) is important. Though the usual meaning of the word is “thought,” in the plural it denotes the place where thought takes place—that is, “the mind.” In the scriptures, its cognate, “mind” (*νοῦς*, *nous*), always carries a theological nuance that centers on an understanding of the divine will especially in terms of salvation. Unfortunately, the mind can be corrupted through blindness. As Paul clearly shows, one of the tools Satan uses to get people to distort, dismiss, or ignore God’s word is to blind them to its importance. When that happens, as Paul states, they are unable to perceive the gospel that discloses the glory of Christ. His words suggest that when he speaks of the mind, he means judgment itself. Thus, the work of both God and Satan is to capture the mind. That being the case, the Apostle works against the adversary by proclaiming publicly the truth of the gospel so that his hearers have the correct information they need to commit to Christ.

When Paul states that due to the adversary’s work, some are unable to “discern the light,” he does not use the normal word for “light” (*φῶς, phōs*) but rather *φωτισμός (phōtismos)*, a word that connotes “enlightenment” or “perspicacity.” When speaking figuratively, the two nouns share an important connection. The noun *phōs* (“light”) is directly associated with the divine. Indeed, God is light and dwells in light, and Jesus is “the light of the world,” and to those who follow Him He gives “the light of life” (1 John 1:5, 7; John 8:12). On the human level, the term connotes what is ethically good and is associated with such things as the illuminating power of scripture. To open one’s heart to the light is to experience God’s saving power. Receiving light, therefore, has a direct connection to redemption from evil. Thus, an essential component of light is divine power that individuals can receive that assists them in the salvation process. The noun *phōtismos* (“enlightenment”) denotes a keen knowledge and understanding of gospel truths that have been revealed in some detail. In Paul’s case, it refers to the ability of people to discern the glory of gospel truths and, more specifically, the glory that belongs to Christ in His role as Savior.

4:5

In 2 Corinthians 4:5, Paul briefly but powerfully explains what he and his companions were and were not about. At the heart of his declaration is his assurance to readers that his purpose has never been to put himself or his fellow missionaries forward. Christ as Lord is the focus of all they do. For that reason, all ministers have to humbly take a backseat. Such a position flew in the face of certain attitudes and mores in the Greco-Roman world. This was a place where self-aggrandizement and self-promotion were all important, especially among those influenced by Sophist philosophy.

Paul’s refusal to put himself forward, to hide his imperfections and bodily weaknesses, and to play rhetorical games, along with his insistence on paying his own way, drew the ire of many. His further practice of preaching the gospel in clear simplicity to all who would hear only exacerbated the antagonism of his enemies toward him. Yet Paul would not back down. Instead, he not only gloried in his weaknesses but also paraded them for all to see. The reason? It reinforced his insistence that the success of his work (which is quite remarkable) is not his own doing but belongs to the divine. As for himself, he sees weakness as the means that God uses to reinforce the Apostle’s severe reliance on Christ, one that forces him to put the full brightness of the spotlight where it belongs to make sure the gospel light shines exclusively on the Messiah, specifically revealing His role as the crucified and risen God (12:7–9).

Paul’s brief statement in 4:5 is full of insight on the nature and manner of the Christian proclamation. What Paul does is briefly identify the means, content, and manner that he and the other missionaries use to publish their message. The *means* the Apostle describes in terms of proclamation (*φανέρωσις, phanerōsis*)—that is, giving a public and clear declaration of the gospel that is preached in such a way that for those who will hear, it develops faith in the Savior. The *content* he summarizes as “Christ Jesus as Lord.” This very brief declaration is loaded with nuances. It looks at the position of Jesus not only as the Anointed One (what Christ and Messiah mean in Greek and Hebrew, respectively) and therefore the legitimate

bearer of God's word and power but also as the one who, as Lord (*κύριος, kyrios*), holds divine power and authority in his own right. The *manner* is that of a servant (*δοῦλος, doulos*—literally “slave”), one who has voluntarily given himself over to Christ no matter what the cost in order to better push the Messiah's cause of salvation. But the manner is also that of a servant to the Corinthians who is willing to give himself in full measure in serving them.

4:6

In 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul shows that God can shine saving, illuminating light “into our hearts.” The state of the heart is what is at issue. Indeed, much of humankind's spiritual ability depends on the condition of the heart. If people are unable to see the light of the gospel it is because a veil of darkness lies over their hearts. It is here, at the very core of the individual, where the god of this world works to create darkness among the unbelievers. When the heart is dark, the things of God cannot be discerned. When they are not discerned, God remains unknown, thus the necessity of God enlightening the heart in order to reveal His glory as expressed in the countenance (*πρόσωπον, prosōpon*) of Jesus. Further, it takes divine power to transform their hearts so that they are enabled to move both into and then forward in the new covenant (3:4–6).

Paul refers to this divine transforming power as light (*φῶς, phōs*; 4:6). As God allows light to shine in the hearts of the seeking and repentant, it brings them enlightenment (*φωτισμός, phōtismos*). The word refers not only to the ability to see and believe but also to accept the new covenant and allow it to become a part of them. This enlightenment has blessed Paul and his companions and many of his readers. Thus, he can appeal to their witness to support the truth of what he is saying.

To bolster his point, in 4:6 Paul appeals to scripture. He apparently joined the thoughts contained in two disparate verses that both deal with light. These are Genesis 1:3–4 (in which God brings forth light and separates it from the darkness) and Isaiah 9:2 as found in the Septuagint (that promises that those who walk in darkness will see a great light and that it will dwell within them). Since both scriptures contain the idea of light shining forth, Paul could easily join them.

The noun δόξα (*doxa*), “glory,” denotes a manifestation of God's nature and character that humankind, at least to a degree, can comprehend. The term refers not only to His greatness, power, and majesty but also to His saving work. It is when people discern the latter that they find themselves drawn to Him in thankfulness, reverence, and worship. Christians understand that He has revealed His glory perfectly through one person: Jesus Christ. Paul uses the image of Christ's countenance (*πρόσωπον, prosōpon*—literally “face”) as the instrument through which the knowledge of God's glory is made manifest. But the term, as used here, likely refers to the teaching, ministry, and saving work of the Messiah. This idea is confirmed by the Lord Himself. His awareness of His responsibility to disclose the glory of God can be seen in His statement that “I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things” (John 8:28). Thus, as Paul states, it is in the face of Christ that people can see manifest the knowledge of God's glory.

4:7–12

At this point, Paul begins a new segment in his epistle which will run through 5:10. The major theme of this section relates to the suffering he and the other missionaries have had to endure for the sake of the ministry. He begins by noting the paradoxical fact that the glory and wonder of the new covenant moves out into the world through people he describes as “jars of clay.” He admits to their fragility and notes the suffering this condition imposes upon them as they carry out God’s work. The Apostle does not demure in describing the difficulties he and others have had to endure. This is because, as he shows, such suffering serves to advance the gospel’s spread throughout the entire area. He is fully aware that in other circumstances, such intense suffering could be devastating to the work at hand. But as he well knew, “rather than being destroyed by trauma faced in the ministry, true Christians ministers experience renewal [4:16], and the suffering faced in the ministry has a personal outcome: the building up of an eternal ‘tonnage of Glory’ [4:17] that makes suffering pale by comparison.”⁸

It was a common practice to store valuables, including gold and silver coins, in fragile and expendable earthen vessels. Paul seems to be using “jar” (*σκεῦος*, *skeuos*) to denote the human body. There seems to be an echo here to the formation of humankind out of the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7; 3:19). Thus, the imagery is fitting because humans all too often prove themselves to be weak and untrustworthy. Despite this, God continues to entrust His greatest treasures to their safekeeping. Through this imagery, Paul ably deflects those blows struck at him regarding his and others’ bodily weaknesses.

Though his earthy jar, as he admits, has been greatly strained due to trials, abuse, and hardship, it is still intact and fully able to hold the treasure. His imagery suggests that the Apostle saw himself as ordinary at best but, more probably, as inferior since an earthen vessel is the storehouse that holds valuables but of itself can be quite unseemly. Certainly Paul sees himself not as a piece of art but as something cheap, lowly, and expendable. Even so, the imagery creates a bit of a paradox. While the earthen vessel may appear inferior, it contains something quite precious that gives it an importance beyond its own, at least as long as its contents remain in place. That is the apostolic position. These officers may be weak and lowly, but their message, testimony, and authority make them most valuable. They are without question the receptacle of God’s power.

In 4:8–9, Paul lists five paradoxes that constitute mainly his life but also that of all the faithful. Paul well understood that life is full of affliction and the Apostle does not downplay these. Rather he not only admits to them but also emphasizes them to make his point. His suffering, though great, shall not only be overcome but be completely made up through the comfort and deliverance that Christ through His power grants (compare Revelation 7:17; 21:4). These verses show God’s indomitable power as evidenced in Paul’s own life. Thus, though suffering, even unfair suffering, is part of the human experience, the faithful find power through Christ to endure and benefit from it.

In 4:10–11, Paul reaches the climax of his antithesis: “dying yet living.” The idea is that Paul and his companions, and even the Saints, live under the constant threat of being killed like Jesus—that is, by

violence. As the Apostle sees it, the nature of the world in which he works demands Christlike suffering in order to advance the gospel. In short, in order for people to experience Jesus's promised life, Paul and his companions have to experience His dying—that is, the continual suffering necessitated by the demands of their mission. Paul seems to be saying that the often threatened and sometimes abusive condition of his and his companions' lives imitates the slow, painful death of the Lord. In saying this, Paul takes nothing away from Christ's Atonement and the intense suffering He went through in order to achieve it (see Doctrine and Covenants 19:18). He seems, rather, to be looking not at that portion of the spiritual and physical suffering that the Lord went through in Gethsemane and on Golgotha but rather the stigma, ignominy, and indeed, the very depth of humiliation that was associated with crucifixion in the Greco-Roman world. To continually, patiently, and faithfully endure mortification for the gospel's sake was, for Paul, the equivalent of dying as did Jesus.

This is one of Paul's favorite themes. He connects being in hourly perils to dying daily and states that “for your sake, we are killed all the day long” (Romans 8:36; 1 Corinthians 15:30–31). Christian suffering, when done in a Christlike manner, he avers, conforms to the Savior's own death (Philemon 3:10). Paul, thus, sees dying (*νήρωσις*, *nekrōsis*) as the uniting force between Christ and Christian. They become as one in facing the world's humiliating opposition but also in evidencing the hope of the coming triumph and glory of the Resurrection (Romans 8:17; compare Romans 6:5, 8). In all this we see the paradox of the gospel expressed in the Lord's declaration: “He who finds his life shall lose it: and he who loses his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39, authors' translation). Somehow the Saint, in order to achieve eternal life, must become united with Christ in death—that is, in a willingness to suffer mortification for the truth as He did.

With a brief sentence in 2 Corinthians 4:12, Paul summarizes his point. He tells his Corinthian brothers and sisters that he and his companions are dying while the Saints are living. Paul seems to be saying that through the “death” of the missionaries (that is, by their receiving some of the messianic suffering), their converts do not have to endure that same suffering and thus the missionaries bring them life. His point is that the missionaries struggle under the throes of mortal life including hardships, stresses, and even the threat of death—in Paul's imagery, “dying daily”—so that the Saints may have the hope and power of divine life continually abiding in them.

In sum, 4:10–12 shows that missionary service is the vehicle through which God proclaims the gospel to the world. The proclamation includes both the death and renewed life of Jesus. The suffering that Paul and his coworkers endure—which includes the very real threat of death—is in similitude of the suffering of the Savior Himself. It was the Lord's suffering that made the gospel (the good news of salvation in Christ) a reality; it is the missionaries' suffering that spreads the message to all the world. This is the divine method by which the world learns of the death and resurrected life of Christ and what it means for those who accept Him and follow His ways. The work, however, forces Paul and his companions to carry about in their mortal bodies the “dying of Jesus.” They do this in two ways: first, their

labor is in similitude to that of the Lord who lived, suffered, and died for the cause of God, and second, they proclaim His death as the central message of the gospel mediated by weak humans, whom Paul describes as “jars of clay” (4:7).

4:13–15

In this section of his epistle, Paul continues to explain why he does not lose heart even though the outer part of him, the “jar of clay,” is wasting away. His faith points him toward the Resurrection, which gives him hope. His words show that for him, “the source of all comfort is Christ’s atonement.”

Paul takes a moment to stress again why he and his companions do what they do.

He begins by appealing to the scriptures (Psalm 116:10) and thus shows that the missionaries follow the pattern laid down there. Like the psalmist, they are compelled by faith to declare openly what they know. In their case, this is the witness to the “life of Christ” that is at work in the Corinthian Saints. His declaration that due to his God-given ministry, he refuses to become discouraged even in the face of opposition furthers his argument (2 Corinthians 4:1). Repeating this idea in 4:13 rounds out his discussion and brings the whole to an interim conclusion.

The psalm Paul chose serves his purpose very well. It reads in full, “I believed, wherefore I have spoken; but I was greatly disparaged” (authors’ translation). The quote certainly describes the Apostle’s current condition, but its broader context may have been what drew him to it. It shows that the Lord “delivered [the psalmist’s] soul from death” and will also make him walk “in the land of the living.” Further, the psalmist declares that “precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” (Psalm 116:8–9, 15).

In 2 Corinthians 4:14, Paul identifies the basis of his courageous and unflagging preaching—sure knowledge. Of what? The coming Resurrection. Likely it is based on Paul’s own conversion experience when he met the resurrected Messiah (Acts 9:1–9). His understanding may also have derived from information he received when he was “caught up into paradise . . . and heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter” (2 Corinthians 12:3, RN). Certainly, on the road to Damascus, he learned personally and undeniably the reality of the Lord’s resurrection. Based upon that sure knowledge, it would not have been hard for him to extrapolate that the same would happen to him and to all the faithful. His knowledge, like the psalmist’s belief, drove him to speak. But it did more—it also drove him to bear witness to the truth he knew. Though God had already rescued him from “deadly peril,” continued to “lead him in triumph,” and sustained him in the suffering he endured for the ministry, that was not the end; God would also give him victory over physical death in the day of the Lord (1:8–10; 2:14; 4:7–11).

The Greek in 4:15 presents a number of translation difficulties. Even so, Paul’s thought does come through. In that verse, he once again briefly outlines the purpose, means, and goal of his work that has been and continues to be beneficial for the Saints. His purpose is for grace to increase thankfulness. The means is helping more people receive that grace with thanksgiving. The goal is that God will receive greater respect and honor. In Paul’s formula, it is God’s grace itself, as multiplied through many, that

causes thanksgiving to overflow, resulting in an increase in appreciation, honor, respect, and reverence—in a word, glory (*δόξα, doxa*)—toward God.

4:16

Paul's writings in 2 Corinthians 4:16 reveal his understanding of a body/spirit dualism, but his view shows this dualism to be very soft as opposed to that of some of his contemporaries who saw it as very hard. The Apostle's thoughts clearly reveal his understanding that there is a non-physical or spiritual component of human beings. He expresses his view with the admission that though his outward form, the "jar of clay," is being depleted day by day, his inner person is being renewed day by day (compare Romans 7:14–25). In this way the new creation—that is, the spiritual being—finds continual strength to push forward.

4:17

Paul assures his readers in 2 Corinthians 4:17 that the present affliction brings about "for us" (*ἡμῖν, hymin*) a breathtaking and eternal mass (*ὑπερβολή, hyperbolē*) of glory, the same as that associated with the divine. Perspective is all-important. Suffering does not last forever, while glory does (compare Doctrine and Covenants 121:7). Paul's symbolic language emphasizes his point. To restate what he says in modern vernacular, the Saints' few ounces of affliction cannot compare to the tonnage of glory that they will eventually receive (compare Doctrine and Covenants 63:66).

Though it may appear that Paul is downplaying the hardship that he, his companions, and many of the Saints are experiencing, we must keep in mind that he is well aware of those hardships—even death threats—that he and others have already suffered. Though admittedly the outer being suffers, the trials will yield an incomprehensible glory in the world to come. Persecution and suffering are not in themselves sanctifying. Salvation requires enduring life's difficulties and unfairness—and especially when one is persecuted for the gospel's sake—in righteousness (Matthew 5:11–12). Thus, suffering has its purpose.

The point Paul strives to make is that such earthly but divine glory, even though marvelous and to be sought after, pales almost to nothingness when compared to the eternal weight of glory that God will give the faithful in the Resurrection. Such glory will be both eternal and full beyond all measure and proportion. Paul, at least to a degree, experienced this when he was "caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (2 Corinthians 12:4). Thus, Paul can witness to that "which neither eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor entered into a person's heart—all these things God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9, BYU Rendition).

4:18

In 2 Corinthians 4:18, Paul gives the reason why he and his companions focus as they do on the eternal rather than the temporal. In the visible but very temporary world, the Christians experience unhappiness,

pain, trials, and even undeserved persecution. In the eternal world, as they are promised, there will be an unimaginable weight of glory with its associated joy, peace, concord, and amity.

The Apostle's emphasis is on what the people are going through when compared to what they will receive for doing so in faith. One is transitory and therefore should command little attention. The other is eternal and should therefore command a great deal of attention. Paul echoes Hebrews 11:1 in which faith is described as the power to see as a reality the future glory that one can obtain (see also Alma 32:21; Ether 12:6).

Thus, Paul teaches that the present circumstances do have their value, for they prepare the Saint for the reception of an eternal weight of glory.

2 Corinthians 5

5:1–5

Paul starts this section with his heartfelt testimony. His words “we know” (*οἶδαμεν, oidamen*) denote more than a fundamental or theological conviction of his faith. It suggests a sure knowledge—in Paul's case, one that is based on his personal experience in seeing the resurrected Lord and what he learned from the other eyewitnesses (Acts 9:1–9; 1 Corinthians 15:3–8). What he absolutely knows is that when we are unclothed from our mortal body, we will be reclothed with a heavenly and eternal one like Heavenly Father has. Here he more fully contrasts the temporary with the permanent, the mortal with the eternal, and the seen with the unseen (2 Corinthians 4:18; compare 1 Corinthians 15:51–58). The present, finite body is subject to pain and suffering, wear and tear, sorrow and grief. But that is not the final destiny of the soul. The present mortal body with its earthly encumbrances and restrictions, Paul teaches, will be replaced with an eternal body freed from the frailties, pains, and corruption imposed by mortal life.

In 5:2–4, Paul explains why he groans under the limitations and burdens of his earthly body and why he yearns for a heavenly one. His experience, he shows, acts to stoke his desire for “our habitation from heaven.” He here changes his imagery from the body as a tent to the body as an outer garment. He has two such garments in mind. One is mortal and physical while the other is immortal and spiritual. The latter provides for the Saint an adequate dress for celestial glory. It is noteworthy that he desires not to be rid of a body but rather for his earthly body to be changed into a heavenly, celestial, and glorious one of flesh and bone (Doctrine and Covenants 130). The sentence found in 5:3 acts as a parenthetical correction designed to head off any misreading of his statement in 5:2. He is looking at the nature of the soul between death and resurrection. He refers to this state of a bodiless spirit as being naked—that is, vulnerable and helpless as it must wait on other factors before it can be clothed again. Only with the Resurrection can it receive the power and honor it desires by once again being clothed by its physical body, now divinely transformed, purified, and glorious. Though Paul does not look forward to this possible period of nakedness with its uncomfortable helplessness, his emphasis centers on his expectation of receiving his divinely endowed resurrected body.

In 5:5, Paul witnesses how God is active in the salvation process. First, He fully prepares the individual for eternal life. The Apostle does not elaborate on how the Father has done this but assures his readers it is so. Second, he states that God has given the Saints the Holy Spirit, which acts as divine assurance or guarantee that they will actually achieve the eternal life that He has promised them. His point is important. The companionship of the Holy Ghost acts as a purifying agent to gradually provide the promise or sealing (*ἀρραβών*, *arrabōn*) that the recipient, at that point in their life, has become cleansed and will receive all that Heavenly Father has in the highest of His kingdoms.⁹

5:6–7

In 2 Corinthians 5:6–7, Paul gives witness to his continued confidence even in the face of difficulties and the adversity he experiences on an almost daily basis. But his claim is not to some personal heroic faith. It is God-given based on the Apostle’s assurance of the Resurrection as certified and guaranteed by the continual operation of the Spirit in his life. This “down payment” (*ἀρραβών*, *arrabōn*) on his future celestial abode makes it sure. It is this sureness that is the source and power behind his constant and sustaining confidence. This confidence reaches into the future to his final judgment before Christ when his works will be fully manifested and approved. His confidence acts as a foil against his Corinthian antagonists, for it stresses the feeling he has as to the correctness of his teachings and lifestyle before God.

In 5:6, Paul insists that he is not simply *being* confident but that he *has* continual and overflowing confidence through the principle of faith. This spiritual condition is not something he musters from within but is a gift given to him from above based on his testimony of the reality of the Resurrection. That he uses the plural pronoun “we” shows that such confidence does not belong to him alone but to all who move forward in life through faith.

In this section, Paul’s thoughts have moved from his concern with the possible period of nakedness in the spirit world where the soul feels the full weight of an uncomfortable helpless existence. Instead, he looks confidently to the glorious future beyond that period.

The thought expressed in 5:7 that mortality consists of walking by faith not by sight, though but an interjection, identifies the quintessence of the mortal condition as viewed by Christians. It also expresses the central argument of the whole of this epistle.

Paul uses the phrase to amend his point that being in mortality demands not being with the Lord. His words show that being mortal does not mean that a person is cut off completely from the divine. It is the invisibleness of God to the natural man, not His absence, that Paul is stressing.

His words explain the very nature of mortality for the faithful by stating what it is and what it is not. It is a walk, a movement along a path toward an objective. The path is defined by faith in Christ. In this instance, *πίστις* (*pistis*) encapsulates the idea of a confidence in the Savior so strong that one is willing to acknowledge, follow, and obey Him at all costs. Mortality isn’t a walk by sight with the end clearly visible

and assured. The Saints can have hope though temporarily away from the Lord because of their testimony of the reality of the Messiah even though, for the present, He is unseen (compare 1 Peter 1:8–9).

5:8–9

In 2 Corinthians 5:8–9, Paul returns to the theme of the confidence he has in the Lord due to the life he has lived before the divine. He clarifies his feelings about escaping the vicissitudes of mortality and the constant grind he is under. Death holds no fear for him, he assures his readers. Rather, he sees it as a real boon, for he will be with the Lord. That he states he will be “at home” (*ἐνδημέω, endēmeō*) shows the positive nature of the relationship he expects to have with the divine during the time he will spend in the spirit world. It is knowing that he will someday be with the Lord that drives him to do what is pleasing before his Master. The very thought forces him to “eagerly strive” (*φιλοτιμέομαι, philotimeomai*) to please Him. Paul’s point is that it does not matter where a person’s spirit is when the Second Coming happens. Whether on earth or in paradise, each Saint should be anxiously engaged in doing what will please God (compare John 8:29; 1 John 3:22). Though Paul does not specify how the Saint is to please God, he does indicate the degree of energy each one should put into it, saying that it requires “zealous effort.”

5:10

In 2 Corinthians 5:10, Paul explains clearly why he and others should be anxiously engaged in pleasing the Lord. While exchanging gifts (*charis*) and creating a relationship with the Father and Jesus as the Mediator and Gift Broker, the trial will be a pleasant experience. This verse also has judicial overtones reflecting the practice of the day in which a judge sat on a raised platform, or *bema*, to hear cases and give a verdict. It is Christ who will be the sole judge at the Final Judgment, and His judgment will be based on each person’s faith or faithlessness equally.¹⁰

Paul is clear that all *must* appear (*φανερωθῆναι, phanerōthēnai*) before the judgment seat of Christ. Though the scriptures do state that God is the judge of the world, they also make it clear that He judges through Christ.¹¹

Paul’s words show that this personal appearance consists of more than just showing up. Rather it refers to the moment when the soul is laid bare, such that all will see the true nature of the person’s character based on faithfulness according to one’s understanding. Judgment will be rendered according to what has been revealed. Paul’s point seems to be that even though a person is a Christian, more is necessary. The solemnity demanded by the coming judgment must be kept in mind since “the life of faith does not free the Christian from the life of obedience.”¹²

5:11

Paul begins this section with the witness of the missionaries’ personal knowledge of the “fear” (*φόβος, phobos*) of God. The experiences the other missionaries may have had with God and Christ have not been

preserved. Fortunately, at the least, some of Paul's have. The aftermath was an abiding fear, or deep-seated awe, for God. As Paul now writes to the Corinthians, that motivating fire not only drives him to the work but also enhances his desire to be united with the Lord.

Paul's writings reveal that fear—or better, awe—in this case, promotes reliance on God along with the power of His Spirit in both preaching and living the gospel (1 Corinthians 2:4). The phrase should not be construed to mean that terror should be the motivating power that dictates a person's life. Rather, it depicts an attitude that each Saint should have toward the divine. In Paul, faith and fear are united, but with him fear has no anxiety. Instead, it brings hope and anticipation.

Fear does not determine the life of the Saint but even after conversion, they must be conscious of and respect God and Christ's places as judge (Romans 11:20). By living according to such consciousness, the Saint can enjoy the hope of finding their recompense in the Savior's words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21).

Through his clear and truthful reasoning, Paul undercut his opponents' apparent accusations that he worked out of impure motives for his own benefit. His logic is compelling. He has already shown his readers that God has given his ministry the seal of approval and thus stands behind it (1 Corinthians 9:1–2). Even at the time of this writing, Paul can assure his readers that he is "well known to God" (2 Corinthians 5:11). Since Paul can stand before God with a clear conscience, he certainly can do so before the Christian house churches at Corinth. Furthermore, since the fear of God motivates his every effort, he certainly would not jeopardize his standing with the divine by preaching falsehoods or being deceitful, and in this, he is willing to let God be the judge. Paul admits that he has to "keep trying to persuade people" (5:11) to his cause but can do so because it is just. He expresses his personal hope that as he is well known to God, he is well known to his readers as well. He appeals to their conscience (*συνείδησις*, *syneidēsis*), a noun that in this case refers to a consciousness or awareness on their part concerning the character and good works of the missionaries and, more especially, those of Paul himself.

5:12

Paul's argument undercuts his detractors' position because it relies on outward appearance to determine what is true. Because his detractors refuse to look deeper (that is, at the heart of the matter), they have come to wrong conclusions and should be ignored. In contrast, Paul opines that his readers should know the life he lived among them and the power of his teachings. Remembering these should supply them with the ammunition they need to launch an effective defense in his behalf. He seems to be willing to demand such a defense because it is proper being centered not on Paul but on the gospel that he preaches and the authority that stands behind it.¹³ Remembering Paul's example and integrity while he lived among them meets two important conditions. First, they should be able to see, as he does, that God stands behind his work. Second, they should be able to successfully defend both His work and doctrine.

5:13

In 2 Corinthians 5:13, Paul seems to be rebuffing additional charges his detractors made against him. Due to his perceived self-commendation, these interlopers could have raised the charge that he was not being rational.

Paul's defense is two-pronged. First, if he is either crazy or ecstatic, it is to God's advantage. That statement stresses yet again the Godward orientation that marks the pattern of the Apostle's efforts. All that Paul does is for the glory of God and to promote God's will and way. Second, if he has a sound mind or is being very rational (*sōphroneō*), it is to the Saint's advantage, for they can then take him at his word. In sum, Paul is assuring his readers that however they read him—as acting insanely, ecstatically, or rationally—he is doing what he does for the good of the Saints and their God.

5:14–15

Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 5:14 brings to an end his explicit proof that he has not engaged in self-commendation, as he stresses that the love of Christ is the compelling force that completely dominates and urges him forward (*συνέχω*, *synechō*). This love is deeper and more gripping than mere moral influence, even though that would constrain people from boasting in themselves. In the missionaries' case, and especially for Paul, however, such love is a positive force that both allows and urges them forward in the proclamation of Christ and His gospel. Certainly it is what dominates Paul's willingness to suffer the loss of all material things and even to die for the cause if necessary (Philippians 1:21; 3:7–11). It is the overmastering force that drives him in all his missionary efforts to bring people to know the Lord in the hopes that they will come to that same depth of love.

Paul's purpose in 5:14–15 is to shore up his reason for preaching. These verses speak of the representation and renewal that grows out of the implications of an aspect of the Savior's mission. The Apostle draws his readers' attention to what Jesus did: He shared what all humans share—namely, death, the universal condition brought about due to Adam and Eve's transgression (Romans 5:12, 14). But Jesus did more: He died for the salvation of all humanity (*ὕπερ πάντων ἀπέθανεν*, *hyper pantōn apethanen*). The preposition *ὕπερ* (*hyper*) has numerous possible translations, and among those that could apply to the three instances in these two verses are “on behalf of,” “in place of,” “in the name of,” “for the sake of,” and, most notably in the present context, “for the salvation of.”

Paul's point is that the Savior's death does not automatically give a high quality of spiritual life to all as they move through their mortal existence. Indeed, those who refuse to walk His path remain morally condemned and spiritually dead, not having been adopted as God's sons and daughters and are therefore shut out from His presence (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). Thus, they move in a living death headed for physical death and eventually judgment and punishment. The only way all can benefit from Christ's death and Atonement is through repentance and gospel living; otherwise, they find condemnation. Even so, He has paid the debt. If they choose not to accept what He has done, they have only themselves to blame.

Verse 15 declares in no uncertain terms the centrality of Christ in the salvation process both universally and personally. Universally, He died for all; personally, He died so that those who are spiritually alive in Him “might no longer live for themselves” but live for Him and for the benefit of promoting His gospel. Thus, He died and was resurrected especially for us. The phrase “no longer” signals the point of conversion. At that point they are miles away from where they were before they were adopted into the divine family and could cry, “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15). Through their conversion, selfishness has been done away with, allowing them to live for others. In the present context, those converted are Paul and his companions and those in their audience who live unselfishly for the good of the Corinthian Saints.

5:16–17

With 2 Corinthians 5:16–17, Paul makes very clear his intentions in writing this unit of the letter. He states that because of the Atonement, those who have been converted, as he has, can no longer see people from a limited mortal point of view (*κατὰ σάρκα, kata sarka*). They have become quite indifferent to the mere external qualifications of others. Their heightened viewpoint stands in marked contrast to Paul’s antagonists’, who put full confidence in such things. Paul’s point is that conversion prohibits a person from seeing and judging others because it is based on superficial criteria.

Paul admits that there was a point in his own life when he viewed Jesus, as did many of his colleagues among the rulers of the Jews, as only a mere mortal. Based on their very limited human viewpoint, Jesus did not meet their expectations for messiahship. He also threatened the very foundations of their traditions, station, and religion. These facts Saul the Pharisee knew well, and as a consequence, he moved against those who followed Christ’s way. But the Apostle Paul now knows that the flawed historical viewpoint had to yield to the insights gained by the power of the Spirit that not only transcended but also corrected the very limited human perspective.

Paul describes the effects that the Atonement can have not only upon all those who enter into a relationship with the Messiah (*ἐν Χριστῷ, en Christō*) but also upon their worldview. The Savior’s death, as Paul understands it, brought to pass a new epoch in history and with it a new understanding of existence itself. All that came before this period, for both Jewish and gentile converts, has now passed away because it had become obsolete and valueless in the salvation process. In their place a new social order, theological system, moral code, and sacred literature were growing as the missionaries pushed God’s word and the people accepted it.

5:18–19

In 2 Corinthians 5:18, the Apostle teaches that God alone initiates the act of reconciliation. The single objective of this act is to restore a person’s good relationship with Him. To stress the point, Paul shows that the action is unilateral; it is the person who is reconciled to God, not God who is reconciled to the person. Deity

acts first. Thus, Paul reveals God as the great benefactor, with Christ being the means of that benefaction and Paul with his companions as the human agents or representatives of the munificence of salvation.

But how is reconciliation even possible? This is what Paul makes clear in 5:19. He has already taught that judgment is coming, when people will receive recompense for their actions (5:10). Indeed, *all* will face the day of reckoning. Such reckoning takes three steps. The first is the collection of all charges, the second is the totaling of the full debt, and the final is the placing of the full balance to a person's account. What is placed there is moral wrongness. Paul uses a Greek word (*παράπτωμα, paraptōma*) that includes all types of sin. Its nuances range from simple missteps to acts of outright rebellion. The doctrine he teaches is that even the slightest infractions of divine law must be accounted and paid for.

When Paul talks about how the world (*ὁ κόσμος, ho kosmos*) can be reconciled to God in Christ (5:19), he seems to be referring to a universal event as opposed to something that affects only the Saints. That being the case, *no one* is barred from being reconciled with the Father and finding association with Him. However, the Father never forces others to be reconciled to Him. His children have to choose whether or not they want this to happen. And there is a cost. Full reconciliation is possible only when sinners acknowledge their sins, repent, and allow reconciliation to take place.

5:20

In 2 Corinthians 5:20, Paul identifies the authority by which he and his companions work and that undergirds their message. They are representatives (*πρεσβεύομεν, presbeuomen*) of Christ. The Greek verb carries the idea of having an official authorization and, in this case, an authorization that is divine in origin and purpose. Concerning Paul and his companions, that authority expresses itself in what these emissaries proclaim. They speak the word and will of God, and therefore there should be no debate.

5:21

Paul's answer to the question posed in the verses above is that Christ's Atonement made it possible for the Father not to reckon or impute sin to the sinner. To express how God does what He does, Paul uses the word "imputation" (*λογίζομαι, logizomai*; see also Romans 4:4–8). The sins of the sinner God imputes to Christ. This is more than an act of substitution. In that case, there would have been an interchange of guilt and righteousness. In this case, what happens becomes much deeper and far more personal. As it were, Christ becomes the sinner and the sinner becomes the righteous heir. As such the Father could accept the once-sinner as one fully righteous on Christ's scale and, thereby, be reconciled to him or her. The process is allowed because of the absolute sinlessness of the Messiah in mortality. It was because of this that He could act as a substitutionary sacrifice for sin. Thus, as Paul states, "God made him sin for us," or in other words, Jesus was made a sinner in our stead.

But what does Paul mean in 5:21 by saying that God did what He did so that “we might become the righteousness of God in him,” meaning Christ? The answer is found in the phrase “in him” (*ἐν αὐτῷ, en auto*)—that is, through the Messiah.

It is noteworthy that Paul does not, in this instance, mention the Savior’s willing obedience to the task He alone could do (as he stresses in Philippians 2:6–8). Instead, he focuses on the act of God who “made” (*ποιέω, poieō*) Christ a sinner for all. The Apostle likely meant the word to be taken in the sense of being appointed or designated. The reason Paul gives credit to the Father may be that he felt the need to spotlight the Father as the one who worked to save humankind. Nonetheless, he concludes that it is due to Christ that we are able to take on that high degree of righteousness that reconciliation demands. In sum, it was the Father’s initiative that assigned the Savior to the role of sin-bearer and the Son’s love that gave Him the daring to perform His sacrificial death (2 Corinthians 5:14).

2 Corinthians 6

6:1–2

Here Paul uses Isaiah 49:8 to highlight God’s open invitation for the Saints to join him. They, however, have a responsibility: they have to willingly receive (*δέχομαι, dechomai*) that grace with full conviction. There is, however, a message behind the message. It is tacitly implied by the adverb *νῦν (nyn)*, “now.” It is that such a period is not indefinite, and therefore, Paul’s readers must act immediately. His words show that even though the divine reaches out in grace, the individual must accept it; otherwise God’s effort has, unfortunately, neither result nor effect (*εἰς κένον, eis kenon*). The Apostle’s words indicate that though it is God who extends grace, it is up to each individual to receive it. God does not force His grace upon anyone because He is always respectful of their agency. The result of rejection leaves people in their very weak, mortal condition to follow their own devices and reap the negative consequences that naturally follow.

Paul’s admonition at the end of 2 Corinthians 6:2 stresses his readers’ need to act willingly and with full commitment without delay. The reason is that the present time, the now (*nyn*), demands immediate action. The present is the most favorable time (*εὐπρόσδεκτος, euprosdektos*) to act, for God’s grace is being extended, making the present the time of salvation. The phrase emphasizes Paul’s urgency, likely due to his awareness of the all-too-rapidly approaching apostasy, and his desire for this moment not to be lost (2 Thessalonians 2:1–12; Acts 20:28–31). He is well aware that “a day of salvation” is coming to an end. When that happens, all who have not responded to his message, at least for the time being, will be left unsaved.

6:3–10

This section marks a rather abrupt change in focus. Just before, Paul was admonishing the Corinthians to be reconciled to God, and then suddenly he begins a long catalog of his credentials. Though the transition is abrupt, the content of this section actually continues a theme he has been developing beginning

in 2:14—namely, the nature of an authentic ministry. This section ties directly to the desire expressed in 5:18 to give the Corinthian Saints a reason for being proud of him and his associates. Thus, the catalog of hardships along with the list of the manner and means of the ministry all show Paul’s excellence as a disciple of the Savior and lay the foundation for his beloved converts to appreciate and even be proud of him.

That Paul does not list the influence of the Holy Ghost until verse 6 seems odd since this gift is paramount and often a precursor, if not the generator, of the other virtues and would seem best named first. Paul does not, however, order these virtues by their importance or other logical considerations but rather by the sound and rhythm each produces.

He lists here those characteristics that are the basis of a true and valid commendation (see 3:1) by which authentic ministers can be known. The description breaks into four units: (1) the outward hardships (6:4–5), (2) the inward and saintly characteristics (6:6–7), (3) the armor of righteousness whether well or ill spoken of (6:7–8), and (4) the characteristics just the opposite of those Paul’s detractors ascribe to him (6:8–10).

In 5:3, the Apostle stresses that he and his companions are striving to behave in such a way that no one should have been able to take cultural or public offense in anything they have done. The reason they have acted as they have, he emphasizes, is to avoid bringing any justified criticism of the ministry. He then, on the flipside of the argument, states what they have done: “In everything we show ourselves to be God’s ministers” (6:4). His point is that he and his companions have acted appropriately in both social and cultural ways and exemplified the laudatory pattern of life expected of the Lord’s servants. By providing this imposing list of evidence of the validity of the ministry that he and his coworkers have carried out, Paul picks up a vitally important thread that he has been weaving and continues to weave throughout his epistle,¹⁴ and one that is at the heart of his contentions with the fractious Corinthian branch. This thread is whether he really needs to prove the validity of his ministry to these people given all he has given of himself for their sake.

It would appear the Apostle is concerned with more than mere finger pointing. His message, after all, was continually inalienably offensive, being based on the ignominy of the cross, and for it he took a lot of heat (1 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 5:11). Rather, his concern may have been that some were trying to make his ministry that of a fool (that is, a senseless or absurd person; see 2 Corinthians 11:16) because, given his physical weakness and continual state of distress, it did not seem to come with divine sanction. He needed to convince his larger audience that his work did not lead people (whether believers or nonbelievers) away from God. If his detractors could prove his work did lead them from God, he should indeed be an object of ridicule. He simply could not let that happen. His defense is, therefore, that he has done nothing by way of self-promotion and has been open and transparent in all his dealings and teachings. Thus, his ministry should stand clear of any disparagement. In sum, this portion of the epistle goes a long way in affirming the Apostle’s work, ministry, and especially, teachings. To emphasize what living in such a way has cost, Paul lists in two sets of phrases all that he and the others have endured for the sake of the ministry.

The first set of tribulations (5:4) looks at what Paul and the others have had to suffer generally—namely, tribulations, distresses, and calamities. Common to all the words in this set is the idea of pressure and confinement with each one listed being “narrower than the one before” and the last suggesting no room for movement or escape. It is little wonder, then, that Paul emphasizes that what he and his people had to deal with required “great endurance” (*ὑπομονὴ πολλή, hypomonē pollē*).

The next set (6:5a), beatings, imprisonments, and mobbings, appears to relate to unpleasant and even dangerous encounters met by Paul and the others as they acted as missionaries. The next set (6:5b), hard unavoidable work, anxious sleeplessness, and hunger, gives a feeling for the bodily hardships they voluntarily endured for the ministry.

Having catalogued the sufferings he and his companions have endured, the Apostle next presents two sets of traits or qualities he and his companions have striven to emulate. The first set (6:6) enumerates four of those inward qualities that Christian ministers, in order to best commend themselves, should display—namely, purity, knowledge, forbearance, and kindness, all of which describe aspects of the inner being. The first denotes an uprightness in a person’s life that expresses itself in moral faultlessness. The second suggests a testimony or inborn witness that has a Spirit-derived depth, breadth, and sureness. The third denotes the ability “to bear up against provocation.” The final one refers to a virtue that encompasses the whole nature of the Saint, causing them to be mellow, gentle, charming, calm, and agreeable. These virtues become the seed of enduring friendships.

The next set of traits (6:6–7a) Paul describes with just two words each and in doing so keeps the rhythm of his piece moving. Those traits—the gifts associated with the possession of the Holy Ghost, such as genuine love, truthfulness, and godly power—go to the heart of the gospel. Though the “good news” centers on overcoming death and hell, how these are accomplished is the central message that the missionaries proclaim and that touches, draws, and holds both the investigator and member. An indispensable characteristic of the message is its truthfulness. This truthfulness can be authenticated by what it produces. This includes the other three virtues and the supernal traits Paul lists here.

Having finished his list of Christian virtues, the Apostle next responds to the two ways people have treated him (6:7b–9a). He begins each clause with the preposition *διὰ (dia)*, “by” or “through,” identifying the means by which the acts were done. Almost from the beginning of his ministry, he has faced opposition, distrust, slander, and misrepresentation. He has not taken these lightly (note his response in 1 Corinthians 4:12–13), and though he has defended himself—sometimes with a rather sharp quill—his motives have always been driven by the hope of winning people over through sincere caring. Many have positively responded to his attempts, even defending him. Here he contrasts these two very different responses, one consisting of the attacks made against him by his detractors and the other consisting of the defense made by his friends in his behalf. Nothing stops him. He ministers through dishonor and glory as well as slander and praise. He has been viewed as a deceiver while actually being true to his mission, and he has been branded a nobody without credentials while actually being well known and validated by God.

The final section (9b–10) looks at the physical conditions under which Paul labored and his attitude concerning them. He faced not only the continual threat of death but also the pain and sorrow attached to an unappreciated ministry along with the lack of temporal resources that went into making life easy. Yet he rejoiced that despite the threat of death and the accompanying pain that it caused, he still lived and rejoiced, for he possessed the fullness of the gospel and thereby made others rich in spiritual power and knowledge.

6:11–13

Having listed the difficulties that he has faced (to which some of his readers have contributed to some degree) and his own positive attitude toward them, Paul makes a plea to his readers. He bases his plea not only on his outward openness to them in which he has hidden nothing but also on his inward openness through which he has fully exposed his feelings to them. He uses the verb “to restrain” (στενοχωρέω, *stenochōreō*) three times to refer to both one’s feelings. He assures his readers that such a condition has not been his, but he fears that it has been theirs and that they have closed off their hearts to him. Though Paul assures them of his love for them, he also lets them know that he will not back down from telling them what God wants for them. The restraint can only be overcome, as Paul emphasizes in the next section of his address, through a process of reconciliation between the Corinthian branches, himself, and God. Further, their salvation depends on it. He stresses that he has already done his part by being as open and loving toward them as he wishes them to be toward him, and he assures them that his paternal feelings for them will continue.

6:14–18

This section presents a translation problem in that it seems to break up the flow of Paul’s argument by introducing an irrelevant warning in the middle of his appeal. Indeed, his argument flows better if these verses are dropped and one begins reading again at 7:2. Because of this seeming interjection, some scholars see this section of 2 Corinthians as supporting the position that the epistle is a composite of several Pauline letters. They note further that this section possesses a number of words that do not occur elsewhere in Paul’s epistles. Though this assertion cannot be disproved, it is not particularly strong. First, the rare words that the Apostle uses here either derive from Old Testament passages that stand behind his appeal or are synonyms of words he has used and, to avoid repetition while continuing the flow and rhythm of his argument, he picks up. Further, this section contains quite a number of Pauline phrases.

Second, the seemingly abrupt change in flow may have arisen due to information that Titus brought back to Paul and that the Apostle paused to address at this point. It is more likely, however, that Paul may have realized that his admonition for the Saints to enlarge their hearts actually had a very negative connotation if viewed through the lens of the Mosaic law (see Deuteronomy 11:16). Such a view could be seen as allowing for the worship of false gods and participating in pagan practices. If that were the case,

the Apostle may have sensed the need to give a warning that his words should not be taken as license to tolerate idolatry or indiscriminate association with gentile neighbors, friends, or associates.

To emphasize his point, Paul uses five sets of images that effectively contrast the marked difference that should exist between the Corinthian Christians and their unredeemed neighbors (6:14a–17a). He uses them to underscore his insistence that his readers guard against being unequally yoked (*ἑτεροζυγέω*, *heterozygeō*) in partnerships with others (6:14). The phrase “unequally yoked” designates the teaming of animals so different that they cannot effectively do the necessary work. The various examples given by the Apostle all emphasize the need for Christians to dissociate themselves from the unfaithful. To further push this point, Paul paraphrases certain Old Testament scriptures, all showing the need for his readers to separate themselves from any who would harm them or the work. Using symbolism, he stresses the current nature of the Corinthian branches. Paul adds the phrase “and daughters” to the passage he quotes (2 Samuel 7:14), which should not be overlooked. Since the temple God was building consisted of all those at the time who entered the new covenant, women must be included because they have indispensable standing in God’s community. Indeed, they participate in very meaningful ways, giving life to the community. This addition also reveals Paul’s desire to be reconciled to all members of the Corinthian community.

2 Corinthians 7

7:1

The material in 7:1, though placed with chapter 7 in the King James Version, actually concludes Paul’s argument begun in 6:14 and should, therefore, be read as part of it.

Based on the scripturally derived promises he has brought to the forefront, the Apostle admonished his readers to accomplish two tasks. The first is to cleanse themselves from two destructive forces (namely, the filthiness of the flesh and the filthiness of the spirit). Associating with nonbelievers in their idolatrous practices was one sure way of contracting deep uncleanness, especially due to the immoral behavior often associated with their form of worship. Thus, Paul’s admonition applies not to literal ceremonial washing such as the Jews practiced but to a spiritual and figurative purity.

The second task Paul wishes his readers to accomplish is to achieve a state of holiness (*ἁγιωσύνη*, *hagiōsynē*) motivated by their reverence and awe (*φόβος*, *phobos*) for God. Holiness is a specific state associated with the divine and the objective God assigns His people. Proper character is the object of holiness. For Christ, the noun “holiness” refers to His perfectly divine character, but for the Christian, it refers to a process through which the Saint’s character grows toward ultimate perfection.

7:2–3

In 2 Corinthians 7:2, Paul picks up the appeal he began in 5:20. He reaches out to his readers, asking them to open their hearts to him in friendship once more. He assures them that his dealings with them

have been above board and honest in all aspects in spite of being accused otherwise (12:17–18). Neither he nor his companions have ever wronged, corrupted, or defrauded anyone. That each of these verbs is in the aorist tense (which looks at a single event in the past) suggests that Paul is referring to his actions when he ministered in Corinth. The Apostle reassures his readers that in making his defense, he is neither accusing them of distrusting him nor trying to put them in their place or on the defensive (7:3). Indeed, he stresses that he carries them figuratively in his heart always, whether in life or death. He recognizes that they are all in this struggle together, and for their sake, he is willing to go the distance. Where such affection and sympathy abound, there can be no room for condemnation.

In the broader context of the letter itself that speaks so openly of life and death,¹⁵ we see the Apostle using the metaphor in a particularly theological way. Indeed, life and death are the way of the Christian, for they were the way of Christ. Those who have entered this relationship and thus come under the power of His grace with its reciprocal obligations are to live in a way that is holy. They achieve this by both separating themselves from the world of sin and dedicating themselves to the service of God. They do not, however, cloister themselves away from the world. Instead, they live in a condition of continual outreach to people who can benefit from and are willing to receive their help. Certainly, to effectively discharge the work of their ministry, they must remain ever in the service of those in both God's kingdom and the world.

7:4

Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 7:4 reveals the great relief caused by the very positive report he has now received from Titus, newly returned from Corinth. He can now say that he has full confidence (*παρρησία, parrasia*) in his readers and can boast (*καύχησις, kauchēsis*) about their faithfulness to him. Indeed, Titus's report has brought him such complete comfort (*παράκλησις, paraklēsis*) that he can testify that he is now overflowing (*ὑπερπερισσεύω, hyperperisseuō*) with joy (*χαρά, chara*). Paul's use of the perfect tense "I am filled" suggests that the Corinthian Saints have been for some time the source of his delight and that his loving feelings for them, with the patience that it allowed, has now been fully and joyfully justified.

There is a point, however, that must not be overlooked. Paul and the others, even though they strive for righteousness and are fully engaged in God's employ, still suffer tribulation.

Though some may wish this condition otherwise, the hope that righteousness will act as a kind of insurance against life's challenges and sorrows will not pan out. Mortality demands that we pass through tribulation, including periods of harsh afflictions, heartfelt distress, and deep sorrow.¹⁶ This should not be a surprise because the Master has clearly warned that "in the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33).

7:5

Beginning with 2 Corinthians 7:5, Paul returns the course of his letter to his account left off at 2:13. Paul has used the long interruption that separates the historical narrative introduced in 2:14 and concluded at 7:4 to vindicate his apostolic office and doctrine and to give praise to God for his place in the ministry. His

high acclaim for the Corinthian Saints found in 7:3–4, though not referring directly to his adventures in Macedonia, does pave the way for his return to the story of his meeting with Titus and then, at this point, stresses the relief and joy the latter’s very positive report brought him and why that was the case.

7:6

Indeed, in 2 Corinthians 7:6, Paul’s language suggests he experienced near rapturous relief at the arrival and report of Titus. Truly, as the Apostle states, he received encouragement (*παρακαλέω, parakaleō*) derived from the divine. As Paul’s envoy to Corinthian Saints, Titus would have both recited and interpreted the letter, then likely answered any questions and attempted to dispel any concerns. This put him in a good position to judge his listeners’ reaction to Paul’s missive. Titus’s account brought the Apostle such cheer and hope that it all but dissipated his emotional distress and pain and greatly strengthened his resolve to visit the Corinthian Saints.

7:7–8

According to 2 Corinthians 7:7, three items in Titus’s report Paul found particularly comforting. The first was the Saints’ strong desire (*ἐπιπόθησις, epipothēsis*) to please Paul and yield apparently to his appeal as expressed in his harsh epistle. The second was their mourning (*ὀδυρμός, odyrmos*) because of the irritation, worry, and even misery that they had caused the Apostle, which led to his need to castigate them. The third, and perhaps the most important, was the fervor or ardor (*ζήλος, zēlos*) they now expressed toward the Apostle. The attitude suggests that they were anxious to put things right with the Apostle and, likely, to defend him against his detractors. The result of this report, as he notes, greatly increased Paul’s joy even over that of reuniting with his good friend and companion. Once again, we see that the Apostle’s joy is enhanced by the joy of others (compare Philippians 2:27–28) and more especially with the effect of Titus’s mission on these beloved people.

The overall thrust of this section centers on the reconciliation that has now occurred between Paul and these treasured Corinthian Saints and the great relief and absolute joy it brought him. Titus’s report has made it clear that Paul’s love has been reciprocated and that his primary audience now stands with him against those who were attacking him. This is an important point. His antagonists have not gone away. Based on what we will read in chapters 10–13, they are still working among the Saints and remain unbowed. Thus, the total unity between the various house churches has not been achieved.

Even so, among those who are Paul’s primary audience, reconciliation has been reached.

7:8–12

In 2 Corinthians 7:8–12, Paul comments on why he wrote the harsh letter and happily notes its positive effect on his target audience. Earlier (2:4) he noted the gut-wrenching emotions that filled him as he wrote that letter. What he did took risky, tremulous courage, for it seems, he realized that rather than

bringing reconciliation, his words could easily result in further alienation. If that happened, it would both embarrass him and hurt his cause. Indeed, his anxiety amounted to near mental and spiritual paralysis such that he could not conclude his mission the area of Troas (2:12–13) but had to move on driven by the hope of finding Titus. It must be kept in mind, however, that it was love, not malice, that drove him to write the stinging rebuke.

In 7:8, he readily admits he knew his letter would not just upset many among the Saints but cause them emotional pain. For that reason, there was a time, he admits, that he regretted having to send it. That period may have lasted up to the moment he heard Titus’s positive report. Despite all the agony he suffered, as he now writes, he neither backs away nor tries to dilute his awareness that he caused the Saints a good deal of pain. Thus, his words in 7:9 do not constitute an apology. Indeed, given the present circumstances, he assures his readers that he now does not regret writing it. The reason is that their salutary hurt acted as a catalyst to their repentance and their reconciliation with him.

Likely recognizing that his admission in not regretting sending the letter could be interpreted as a callous if not a cruel sentiment, Paul explains parenthetically that it did, if only temporarily, cause him sorrow. But he goes on to state that at present, in light of Titus’s report, he rejoices that he had the courage to send it. Even so, Paul desires now to put that whole matter behind everyone and move on. He hopes they can do this because the pain he caused them, though sharp, was but only “for a moment” (*πρὸς ὥραν*, *pros hōran*) and led to healing repentance.

Noteworthy is that Paul refers to repentance only five times in all his writings. At first glance, it seems strange that he would pay seemingly little attention to a primary gospel principle. It is likely that the reason is that the word, as understood at the time, did not sufficiently stress God’s action in the salvation process. With its Hebrew equivalent (*tesubah*), it means simply “turning,” a strictly human experience and operation. Paul, based on the few instances he uses the term, fills out what repentance actually requires. It is a process in which one recognizes one’s wrongdoing in the sight of God and seeks to make amends. Such wrongdoing includes improper behavior toward God’s anointed servants. Indeed, such behavior is actually an affront to God Himself. The reason is that His servants proclaim His word and exercise His authority. They do not act for themselves but for the divine. To reject them is to reject Him and His word.

On that basis, as revealed in 7:9, it is not surprising that recognizing what they had done led the Corinthian Saints not just to feel bad but also to sorrow “in a godly manner” (*κατὰ θεόν*, *kata theon*). The phrase shows that these people sorrowed according to God’s will, or in such a way that it was heartfelt and life changing.

Fortunately, through their repentance, as Paul notes, the Saints “were harmed in no way by us.” But what harm did they avoid, and how was it related to Paul and his companions? Certainly, one answer is that the missionaries would not have visited them and as such reconciliation with Paul, and by implication, with God, would not have occurred. Instead, bitterness and schism in their relationship with Paul would have endured. It is more likely, however, that the Apostle has eternal consequences in mind. As he

notes in 7:10, godly sorrow leads to repentance and repentance leads to eternal life. By realizing what they had done and feeling deeply sorrowful because of it in accordance with God's will, they were once again reconciled to Paul and in the same breath to God, thus again assuring themselves of salvation.

Paul goes on to note in 7:10 that there is a difference between worldly and godly sorrow. The latter results in repentance that leads to positive actions that brings spiritual benefit that will never lead to regret. On the other hand, any remorse of the former is often shallow, full of bitterness and self-pity and devoid of positive actions. Such sorrow can actually lead to greater harm because its suffering can yield to a thirst for revenge.

Paul's remarks in 7:11 play a critical role in his outreach to his readers. Though he readily admits that his harsh letter caused sorrow, he is also quick to point out that the effect brought reconciliation not harm and, more importantly, spiritual life not spiritual death to the recipients. It was the comforting report of Titus, as Paul's words show, that lifted him from the depth of his former apprehensiveness to the height of the joy he now feels. To emphasize the point, he uses seven nouns, each an attribute of these people, to illustrate the magnitude of the positive effect his letter had on them and the good it brought as the Saints' practiced a repentance that led to salvation. The Apostle uses the noun "eagerness" or "earnestness" (*σπουδή, spoudē*), as expressed in the actions of these Saints, to stress the source of his newfound relief and joy. The word reveals that these Saints were not only sincere about being reconciled to the Apostle but also did it with dispatch. That Paul preceded this noun with the indefinite adjective "what" (*πόσος, posos*) stresses the depth of their earnestness (as does the noun's repetition in 7:12).

With a degree of magnanimity, in 7:11 the Apostle states that due to their efforts, these Saints have proven themselves "to be innocent in the matter" (*ἀγνοῦς εἶναι τῷ πράγματι, hagnous einai tō pragmati*). The statement should not be taken to mean that Paul felt they were initially guiltless but that through the depth and sincerity of their repentance, they had become effectively blameless since they now had their former relationship with Paul restored.

This verse highlights the forgiving spirit that marks the life of this Apostle. Though the actions of certain Corinthian Saints had caused him both high anxiety and great distress, he now declares them guiltless. Thus, he holds nothing against them and in doing so reveals the depth of his forgiveness.

The content of 7:12 clearly shows the central point of the harsh letter that had caused the sorrow Paul's audience had initially experienced. The near breaking point between him and these Saints had arisen, as the Apostle notes, over a confrontation that had happened sometime before between a person who had done wrong and the person wronged (2:5–7). The context shows that the latter was Paul himself. Someone in the branch had done him a grave injustice (*ἀδικέω, adikeō*). But just who was it? Though it may have been the incestuous person referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:1–5 whose actions had been justified by some, this is unlikely because his sinful act would not have been directly injurious to Paul himself. It is more likely that it was the turbulent fellow who confronted Paul face to face during his "flying visit" to Corinth.

But it should be kept in mind that from Paul's point of view at least, the issue is not reconciliation between him (as a person) and them, but between them and his apostolic authority, witness, and doctrine.

Therefore, he is very willing to overlook the guilt of these Saints, treating it as nonexistent. As such, he puts into practice his own counsel concerning the need to be reconciled one to another and to God.

7:13–16

Prior to this point, Paul's focus has been on his own interaction with the Saints. He now rejoices as he turns to the result of Titus's interaction. His was the significant yet difficult, even frightening, task of being the interface between the two estranged parties. The text suggests that Titus had misgivings about being Paul's agent in delivering the harsh letter even though the Apostle expressed his faith that the Saints would readily accept Titus. Titus was, therefore, not only very relieved but also delighted to a high degree to find that Paul's encouraging words proved true. We must not, however, take anything away from the role that Titus played. The text suggests that he deftly negotiated the rough sea that raged because of the taxed relationship between these two parties. Through his adroitness, he was able to calm the troubled waters. Due to the positive response to his efforts, the young disciple's mind was quickly set at ease. Out of this grew not only further encouragement but also joy. Titus's encouragement became the basis of his and Paul's joy.

In 7:14, Paul again expresses his great confidence (*παρρησία, parrēsia*) in these members. This was not, however, the only way he expressed that confidence. He boasted (*καύχομαι, kauchomai*) about these people as he reassured Titus that he would be well received. That Paul felt he could boast about these Saints is doubly noteworthy. First, he generally insists that any boasting should be about expressing one's feelings toward God and witnessing of Him and not about other Saints, let alone humankind in general (10:17–18). Secondly, up to the point of Titus's return, these members were far more a source of general concern if not anxiety, frustration, and even sorrow than a source of boasting. Boasting in these people carried a great deal of risk. Thus, his boasting to Titus about his faith in these Saints could have proven vapid if the Corinthians rejected or mistreated the courier of the letter. The result would have brought, at best, embarrassment to Paul and at worst, great shame.

The context suggests that in this whole section, Paul praises these Saints as a means of ingratiating himself with them. He does so by generating an emotional effect that he designed to draw them ever closer. His tactic is to use honey, not vinegar, as the means of attracting and holding them. The reason seems to be that he senses, even after Titus's success, that his relationship with them has not yet been fully secured and thus needs an extra boost.

In 7:15, Paul gives credit for the success of Titus's visit and the great amount of encouragement it generated to these Saints. He does so by relating in some detail not only the effect it had on the young disciple's emotions but also on those of the Apostle himself. Both felt a deeper affection (*σπλάγχνον, splangchon*) for these people, which affection Titus demonstrated "very abundantly." The basis of his joy was their quick obedience to the demands placed upon them. Whether these demands were in the harsh letter or generated by Titus himself, the text does not say. What the text does make clear is that

the Saints recognized and accepted Titus “with reverence and respect” (*μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου, meta phobou kai tromou*) as Paul’s envoy. The implication is that they also recognized that in doing so, they were once again in harmony with God (2:9).

On this basis, Paul concludes this section of his letter (7:16) by repeating the compliment he expressed in 7:4. There he expressed the high degree of trust he has that they will continue to support him even in the face of opposition and, thus, he can proceed without fear.

In sum, this section suggests that the harsh letter coupled with Titus’s explication and defense of it resulted in an exoneration of Paul that greatly exceeded expectations. The support and love the Saints now express for their Apostle stands as the springboard for the next section of Paul’s epistle. Therein he turns to the necessity of the Jerusalem collection and the important role these people can play in it. Thus, this 7:16 acts as a transition between the two sections, the first part (7:4–16) showing Paul’s return to full confidence in these people and the latter part (chapters 8–9) revealing the opportunity he gives them to confirm their confidence in him through the very practical means of donating funds to meet the desperate needs of the Jerusalem Christians.

Notes

- 1 Matthew 10:1–2; Mark 6:30; Luke 6:13.
- 2 For an in-depth look at Paul’s use of the words *pride* and *boasting*, see Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, “Excursus on Pride and Boasting in Paul’s Writings,” in *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, forthcoming).
- 3 Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 364.
- 4 Jeremiah 17:10; 20:12; Revelation 2:13.
- 5 Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, *Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2017), 645.
- 6 For example, see Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 9:19; 2 Corinthians 16:7; Galatians 1:10; Colossians 4:10; Philémon 1:23.
- 7 Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 164.
- 8 George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 249.
- 9 For an in-depth look at Paul’s belief on resurrection, see Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, “Excursus on Paul’s Understanding of the Resurrection,” in *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians*.
- 10 2 Nephi 9:41; compare Alma 5:15; 11:41; 3 Nephi 26:4.
- 11 On God as judge, see Ecclesiastes 3:17; 12:14; Romans 3:6; Hebrews 12:23; on Christ as judge, see, for example, Romans 2:16; 14:10; 2 Nephi 28:23; Mosiah 16:10; Alma 12:10.

- 12 Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 271.
- 13 See 2 Thessalonians 2:4–8; Acts 20:24; 26:19.
- 14 2 Corinthians 3:1; 4:2; 5:12; 7:11; 10:12, 18; 12:11.
- 15 See 2 Corinthians 2:16; 4:10–12; 5:14–15; 6:9.
- 16 See, for example, Doctrine and Covenants 78:14; 109:5; 112:13; 122:5.

Credits

Authors: Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes

New Testament Insights Series Editor: John W. Welch

General Editor: Taylor Halverson

Associate Editor: Morgan Tanner

Senior Editor: Sarah Whitney Johnson

Assistant Editors: Sam Lofgran, Verlanne Johnson

Content Manager: Jasmin Gimenez Rappleye

Source: *New Testament Insights: 2 Corinthians*, by Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes