

2 CORINTHIANS 8-13

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2 Corinthians 8

At this point, Paul transitions to the next reason he wrote to the Corinthians Saints. It is his desire to motivate them to contribute generously to the donations he and others are gathering to assist the impoverished and struggling Saints in Judea (Romans 15:27–29). We must stress here, however, that his major intent is neither to bind these people to himself nor to generate funds for the Jerusalem poor. It is to bind these Saints first to God and then to the rest of the Christian community. Their charitable giving is but a means to that end.

8:1

In 2 Corinthians 8:1, Paul points out the condition under which the faithful Macedonian Saints labored—namely, an extensive and ongoing affliction (*θλίψις, thlipsis*) that resulted from their religious observance. This was a condition imposed by a less than sympathetic state that readily ostracized them from societal functions, employment, and other associations. This condition, however, was offset by a downpouring of divine grace that resulted in an abundance of joy (*χαρά, chara*).

Even so, Paul stresses that though spiritually rich, these people could be described as nothing less than in deep poverty (*πτωχεία, ptōcheia*). Even so, they give not of their surplus or even limited means but beyond them. Their station may have caused them to sympathize deeply with their Judean counterparts and, thus, provide a generous donation, one so great that it surprised Paul and his companions. Thus, it was easy for him to use these faith-filled Saints as an example for the better-off Corinthian brothers and sisters.

8:2–5

In 2 Corinthians 8:2–5, the Apostle details the depth of the faithfulness of the Macedonian Saints, emphasizing the surprising amount of funds they raised for the Judean cause. His motive is clearly to encourage the Corinthian branches to also freely give to the collection. Given the shame and honor code at the basis of Greco-Roman society, reputation meant much to the Corinthians on both the individual and societal levels. Few would accept, either on the social or personal plane, being seen as less than others. This predicament led at times to attempts to outdo others in a show of generosity. In the Jewish world, the pious were expected to give in proportion to their means, but even this could lead to showing off, which was not helpful (see Matthew 6:1–2; compare 3 Nephi 13:1–2).

Given the context of chapter 8, it seems unlikely that Paul is playing on these societal mores. Though there is no doubt he is encouraging the Corinthian members to reach deep into their pockets to assist the poor as had their northern neighbors, his greater desire is that they share in the abundant flow of grace that made the depth of the giving of the Macedonian Saints possible.

Paul’s description of the conditions under which they so generously gave highlights the depth of their generosity. First, they gave voluntarily. There was no coercion or even light pressure. The missionaries presented the opportunity, and these grace-filled people immediately responded. Second, not only did they give but, considering the financial distress under which they lived, they gave even beyond what the missionaries expected. Third, the Apostle notes that they even begged for the opportunity to be involved in the grace offering. His words suggest that the missionaries may have tried to limit the amount that they were offering, but they would have none of it. The irony of this situation is that normally it is the givers who are begged for help, but here it is the givers who have become beggars in their desire to participate in the gift. But such is the case when divine grace flows and conversion takes place.

In 8:2 Paul states that they gave of their earthly goods (*πλοῦτος*, *ploutos*). Given the high degree of poverty these people were experiencing, the noun likely refers not just to the amount they gave but to the purity of the motive that stood behind it. The word Paul uses to describe their simple giving (*ἀπλότης*, *haplotēs*) can be understood as “generous liberality.” The word connotes the depth of their spirituality—a “faultless innocence” and an “uncompromising rectitude,” revealing “a deep-seated purpose, a condition of the soul” that brings the blessing of God by which they became spiritually rich.

Noteworthy in 8:5 is that Paul goes to some length to show that authentic Christianity, even when manifesting the depth of its care of humankind through selfless service, very often meets difficulty, suffering, and even persecution. The Apostle nowhere hints that the problems besetting the Macedonian branches were due to some impropriety or wrongdoing on either the part of the Church or individuals therein. He clearly understands that affliction is the mark of authenticity or, at the very least, the common situation in which the Christian cause moves forward.

Paul’s use of religious metaphors suggests that he views the contributions in terms of a sacred offering imitating the acts of the Savior. In doing so, he reframes gift giving from a societal obligation to an act of

religious devotion in which mutual obligation results in the praise not of human benefactors (the basis of the Greco-Roman practice) but of God as the source of all benefaction. Indeed, as the Apostle states in 8:5, these people had given themselves to the Lord and so could sense His will that they give to others. As a result, they gave themselves also to the cause of the collection. In making this observation, Paul emphasizes that God, ever active and influential in human affairs, is the source that motivates and empowers these sincere actions of human benefaction.

8:6

In 2 Corinthians 8:6 Paul notes the result of the wondrous giving of the Macedonian Saints. It inspired the leadership to encourage Titus (and it seem to have taken little) to go back to Corinth with the assignment to further the collection. The text suggests that Titus had already renewed the Corinthians' efforts to this task because Paul had encouraged him to finish up the collection of this charitable offering, just as he had already begun by returning to Corinth and pushing this ministry there.

8:7

In 2 Corinthians 8:7, Paul skillfully sets up the Corinthians for Titus's success by pointing out that they already possessed many spiritual attributes and that the expression of one more is all that is necessary to accomplish the mission's goal. Paul seems to be building on the pride they took in their spiritual gifts (*χαρίσματα*, *charismata*; see 1 Corinthians 12:4–11; 14:1–9). His exhortation makes the implicit need intimated in verse 6 now explicit. He has it rest on those items in which they excel—faith, speech, knowledge, heartfelt earnestness, and love for Paul and the other missionaries. Because they have excelled in these matters, he asks them to also excel in one more: graciousness of giving. Thus, he calls the contribution a charitable offering (*χάρις*, *charis*). In this way, he draws a parallel between the excellent qualities he has observed among them and the positive response to the plea he is now making. Paul is tacitly suggesting that by generously responding to the work now being rekindled by Titus, they would both build upon and continue the excellent manifestations of God's grace the Apostle had already observed among them.

8:8–15

In this section, Paul's tone shows that he is appealing to the Corinthian Saints in a very loving, familial way motivated by his concern for their welfare. Although he asserts his authority tacitly, he still expects the Corinthians to respond to his authority exactly. In sum, Paul expects them, as his brothers and sisters, to conform to the obligations according to the conventions of gift giving *χάρις* (*charis*) that family members can expect from one another. By using this tone, Paul shies away from the forces of patronage and benefaction that drove much of Greco-Roman civic society. He was neither to be seen as a patron nor client but as a loving brother at work for the benefit of his siblings. Even so, he does not allow them to forget that he has authority to advise and to counsel.

Although this imagery, with its implied family nuances, could put a strain on the relationship, it rather serves to make the Apostle's requests more amicable.

Though appealing to them on the basis of brotherhood and complimenting them on their admirable traits, Paul apparently feels free to admonish them ("see that you also excel in this charitable offering") in 8:7. However, he refrains from using a more forceful imperative form so as not to alienate his audience. Thus, in 8:8, he assures his readers that his words should not be interpreted as a command, but he does admit that he is testing the genuineness of their love as his children. In this, we do hear echoes of patronage in play that invite the Saints to make and keep covenants because of the graceful gifts God the Father bestowed upon them.

In linking the collection to the value system of his audience, the Apostle Paul skillfully places more pressure on the Corinthians than any direct command would do. On the other hand, by not commanding them to give, Paul allows their freewill offering to be an actual act of grace that reveals the depth of God's love that abides in them.

In 8:9 Paul does not allow the generosity of the Macedonian Saints to stand as the greatest show of love. Instead, he has his audience look at one of the greatest acts of love that makes pale what the Macedonians did. This act is the condescension of Christ. In giving the Corinthians this reminder, the Apostle reaches back to the idea of the effects of divine grace (*χάρις*, *charis*) by holding Christ up as the exemplar gift-giver whom we can have a relationship with in the new covenant by giving through service. Thus, the Apostle connects the kindness in giving to the kindness of the Son of God in giving of Himself.

Paul's point in using the Savior as an example is that the Lord gives the opportunity for others to be made rich through His act of self-improvement. In doing so, Paul interweaves the idea of temporal poverty with spiritual riches. He shows that the riches of the Macedonian Saints did not consist in material wealth but in their sincere generosity (8:2). In sum, God's grace did not alleviate their temporal poverty, but it did make them abound in spiritual richness. That wealth allowed them to make an offering beyond what anyone would have expected of them. Given their circumstances, although what they give may not have amounted to much, it was inestimable for they gave beyond their means. Thus, they proved that they themselves were the true riches. It is little wonder then that they experienced an abundance of joy manifest in the downflow of God's grace (8:2).

But the Savior's story does not end with His poverty. He came to make others rich. Indeed, His objective is to share with them the richness of the glory He enjoyed before He descended into mortality (John 17:5, 22). Thus, through the power of the Atonement, the true believer will share in His eternal riches. Because these abound, there is no need for competition between the branches.

In 8:10, Paul does not command the Corinthian Saints to act. Instead, he notes that he has carefully considered the matter and has determined the best course of action for them. Even so, there is no doubt that he is giving his request weight by placing it in the form of serious apostolic counsel as directed by the Holy Spirit. Giving him energy to make his appeal is his belief that though the actual giving to the Jewish

Christian cause has slowed or ceased, the desire to give is still there. He plays on this but adds another reason why his audience should renew their giving: it will be to their advantage—they themselves will receive some benefit from it. This benefit, as he notes in 8:11, is that their desires and acts will make them fully integrated into the charitable program and any current spiritual dissonance between their strong desire and charitable action will be eliminated.

Paul's reference to how the missionaries had initiated the work "last year" (*πέρυσι, perysi*) suggests that the Corinthians' was the first church in the area introduced into the program and the members willingly accepted the opportunity. In 8:11, Paul encourages them to finish it. However, he adds the caveat "according to what you have." By adding this phrase, he is not putting the Corinthian members in a position in which they would need to compete with the overabundance of giving that the Macedonian Saints had exhibited. He is not lowering the bar but telling his audience that what he is asking them to do is immediately attainable.

In 8:12, Paul aligns Christian understanding of giving with that of the Old Testament. What counts is not how much is given but the state of the heart of the giver.¹ By this means, he defuses any concerns on the Corinthians' part that he expects them to imitate the copious action of their northern sisters and brothers. Further, he mitigates against any feeling and perhaps actual accusations that he is attempting to gain some moral advantage by boasting of the Macedonians' abundant giving. He clearly signals that he is a caregiver and protector, not some manipulator.

Paul references the idea of proportional giving based on what one has on hand through expressing a general truth in a condition (*καθὸ ἐὰν ἔχη, katho ean echē*), not on some speculation as to what one might have in the future. He clearly points out that as long as the reciprocal giving is in proportion to one's means—but given with full heart—whatever the amount may be, large or small, it is acceptable to the Lord.

In 8:14, Paul states what he means by fairness and how it works. Given the distress the Jewish Saints are presently under, the Corinthians giving of their abundance (*περίσσευμα, perriseuma*), while placing no great hardship on them, could alleviate the great need (*ὕστερημα, husterēma*) of their eastern sisters and brothers. In this act, a kind of fairness was assured.

But what kind of fairness does Paul have in mind? Two possibilities arise. He could be thinking of a potential future reversal in economic conditions in which the Jerusalem Saints would return the benefaction, or he could have in mind a more immediate reciprocation in that the Jerusalem Saints, by receiving the goods, would generate a loving and prayerful fellowship with these giving members as 9:14 implies. He could actually have both ideas in mind, feeling that the loving relationship would definitely occur while the reversal of economic fortune might occur.

8:16–24

The opening verse for this section (8:16) comes at an important intersection in Paul's appeal. Having established that his injunction is not a command and that he is not asking these Saints to give more than

they can, he has met most of the serious concerns about the collection. He can now address the last by introducing those who would oversee and bring the collection to a close. Before doing so, however, he first assures his audience of the care that he and Titus have for them. The implication is that the major purpose for the collection is not driven by the missionaries' concern for the Jerusalem Saints, though that is there, but for the welfare of the Corinthians. It is they, Paul points out here, who will greatly benefit from this charitable action.

In 8:17, Paul emphasizes in two ways Titus's very positive attitude in assisting Paul in this work. First, with reference to a discussion the two had had (8:6), Paul made a request (*παράκλησις, paraklēsis*) of his companion who had accepted it readily. Given the tension between Paul and some, if not many, of those in the Corinthian house churches, the request was no small matter. Titus's willingness certainly enhanced Paul's delight in and deep appreciation for the young man. There is little doubt that the Saints' positive and heartfelt response to the harsh letter that Titus had delivered had developed in him a deep fondness for them and contributed to his willingness to take on the bigger assignment of completing the collection. Second, Paul now notes that Titus is not only willing to do as Paul asked but is, on his own accord (*αὐθαίρετος, authairetos*), very eager (*σπουδαιότερος, spoudaioteros*) to do so. Indeed, he is voluntarily leaving his associates to take on this task. This act, with the enthusiasm that stands behind it, would likely endear Paul's emissary even more to the Corinthian Saints. But Paul's request of him would have enhanced the trip's importance, giving it apostolic endorsement.

In 8:18, Paul informs his audience that Titus will not be coming alone. He will be accompanied by two brethren, albeit the second is not introduced until 8:22. Here Paul introduces the first. The title "brethren" could be a general designation for a fellow member of the Church, but Paul's note that he is sent (*συμπέμπω, syntremō*) suggests the title carries priesthood authority. The Apostle focuses on the broad and very positive reputation this individual has among the various house churches in the Macedonian province. Either his preaching of or devotion to the gospel, or both, have made him praiseworthy (*ἐπαινος, epainos*) in the eyes of many.

By sending these men, who are known to be honorable, as the ones who will be with Paul at all times, the Apostle protects himself from certain misunderstandings and possible criticism regarding his intent so far as the collection is concerned (8:19–21). This move shows he has given forethought so that he will be clear of any suspicion of using the collection to enrich himself (8:20). Not only that, it allows him to show his goodwill toward the needy Jerusalem Saints and his desire to do what is honorable before all (8:19, 21). Conversely, by working with the three agents, the Corinthians will be able to demonstrate their love for both the Saints abroad and for the Apostle himself.

Paul next lists two additional reasons for the collection (8:19). The first is for the "glory of the Lord himself." Due to Paul's reverence for the Savior, it is little wonder he places it in first position. To bring glory to Him, the Apostle felt, is the ultimate purpose of the new covenant.² Once again, we see expressed

Paul's theology of giving. Its center is in the flow of the transforming and empowering effect of grace (*χάρις, charis*), God's gift. That gift allows people to give their own gift from the heart.

But there was something else at play here. The phrase stresses that Paul's intentions for and his motives behind the collection are pure. He was not working to get anything personally out of it. Which brings us to his second expressed reason for the collection. It allows Paul and the other missionaries to indicate their eager willingness (*προθυμία, prothymia*) to assist in the work. Taking the verse altogether, it defuses any idea that Paul's motives were anything more than that of assisting the poor and glorifying the Lord.

In 8:20, what Paul tacitly indicated before, he now states openly. Clearly, his detractors have already accused him of being deceitful and motivated by financial gain. Here, he continues to build a case against these accusations by explaining to the Corinthian Saints that he is not going to administer the charitable offering by himself but will be assisted by Titus as well as a well-respected brother. Thus, Paul has arranged the circumstances of the final collection and its transportation to Jerusalem not only to make sure the donation got to its destination but also to protect his good name and the apostolic ministry.

The latter point Paul makes clear in 8:21. He does this by closely paraphrasing scripture (Proverbs 3:4 Septuagint) teaching that a leader's actions "must be open to scrutiny" before not only God but more especially the people. Every action done, every deed accomplished, every movement attempted must be transparent so that the people can not only judge the leaders' intent but also feel confident in following them. Paul has already appealed to his own transparency in 2 Corinthians 4:2 (compare 2:17; 5:11). This condition, he stresses here, is especially so when it comes to financial administration, where the greatest temptation lies to violate a trust.

In light of transparency and honesty in administering the funds, in 18:22 Paul introduces yet another assistant who will help gather, guard, and transport the funds.

The Apostle Paul recommends this individual based on the three criteria. First, he is "our brother" (*ἡμῶν ἀδελφον, hēmōn adelphon*)—that is, he is in full fellowship with the Saints.

Second, the individual has been tried "often and in many ways" (*ἐν πολλοῖς πολλάκις, en pollois pol-lakis*) through being assigned to various responsibilities in which he has proved himself fully diligent (*σπουδαῖος, spondaios*). Finally, he is now diligent, displayed with an energetic and even zealous effort for the cause, to take up the task due to the reported goodness of the Corinthians and their own reported enthusiasm for finishing the collection.

Who are these men? And why does Paul not name them? On these subjects there has been a great deal of scholarly speculation. Suggestions on who these men might be range from Luke through Apollos and Timothy to Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, and Gaius, all known associates of Paul. The Apostle provides two particular qualifications for the first brother: that throughout the churches (at least in Macedonia), people respect him and that the churches in the region had appointed him to this task. For the second brother, the Apostle notes but one (albeit a very important) attribute: he has proven himself diligent in all assignments given him. These three qualifications do not narrow the field because all

the men mentioned above seem to meet them. That the men were most likely from Macedonia helps narrow the field; only three were from that province. Sopater was from Berea, while Aristarchus and Secundus were from Thessalonica (Acts 20:4). As a result, support for any two of these three seems cautiously warranted.

The question still remains why Paul did not name these men since he is quite liberal in mentioning those who assist him. Speculation ranges widely. Among the suggestions are that these men were totally unknown to any of the Corinthian Saints, and therefore, naming them would have meant nothing to Paul's audience. Conversely, these men were well known to the Corinthians and, therefore, mentioning them was superfluous. Going on, since Paul regularly names those whom he appoints, he left the names of these men out because he did not appoint them. And again, naming them would have given them a status Paul did not want them to have, fearing it would dilute Titus's influence. Finally, their names were in the original letter but later removed by an over-zealous scribe who felt they became associated with heresy. Of these, the idea that they were unknown to the Corinthian members of the Church seems the best, most logical choice.

In 8:23 Paul gives the status of the men both he and the Macedonian churches are sending to assist in the fundraising. He declares Titus to be both his partner (*κοινωνός, koinōnos*) and his fellow worker (*συνεργός, synergos*). The way Paul structures his wording emphasizes that Titus is his full partner in this enterprise. Both titles highlight a state of equality between the two men and thus stress Titus's authority to act. That authority, however, as Paul notes, he is to use to benefit the Corinthian Saints. The two accompanying brethren he refers to as envoys (*ἀπόστολοι, apostoloi*), men having full authority to act but in a secondary position. He enhances their status, however, by stating that they are "reflections of the splendor of Christ" (*δόξα Χριστοῦ, doxa Christou*). This designation bestows upon them a sense of the divine that gives purity to their character and a pure quality to the motive behind their mission.

By highlighting their authority and character in glowing terms, Paul confirms, if not elevates, their status before his target audience and thereby, hopefully, makes these emissaries men whom the Corinthians would be willing to accept and assist.

In 8:24, he instructs his audience how to accept and assist Titus and the other brothers. It is by proving (*ἐνδείκνυμι, endeiknymi*) themselves in two ways: First by expressing a deep, warm, and sincere love (*ἀγάπη, agape*). Though Paul does not state specifically what the object of that love should be, the tacit implication is that it is Titus and his companions. Based on his statement in 8:8 connecting love with the collection, the Corinthians were to express their love by following the example of the Macedonian Saints in freely giving to the collection. Second, they are to accept and assist by confirming the propriety of Paul's bragging (*καύχησης, kauchēsis*) about the virtues of the Corinthian Saints to these men. Paul then exhorts these Saints to express their love and confirming actions so conspicuously that the entire family of Saints in the area will be aware of and hopefully positively influenced by it.

2 Corinthians 9

In chapter 9, Paul continues to express his confidence that the Achaean Saints will finish what remains of the gathering of funds for the poor Jewish Christians suffering in the Holy Land. “In many ways this was a radical call to discipleship and a test for the Gentile converts who may have felt marginalized by some Jewish-Christians. It was also unprecedented in its scope—collecting a charitable donation from around the Mediterranean world for a specific group in Judea.”³

Though Paul is confident that his readers will respond to his encouragement, he still sends Titus and two associates to push forward the work. That Paul includes the Christians living not just in Corinth but in whole province of Achaia is telling. The Christian community, so far as we know, had not yet begun to construct or gather in church buildings. Thus, they were yet meeting in individual house churches. That being the case, opposition to Paul may have been rather selective, mostly affecting some of those Christians living in the city but not in the country. If that is the case, then his high praise for the Saints in the general region but his expressed concern for some individuals and congregations in specific areas can be easily understood. By being quite inclusive, Paul does protect himself from any tension between himself and those less than friendly branches of the Church in Corinth.

9:1–5

The central message of this paragraph (2 Corinthians 9:1–5) deals with Paul’s pride and boasting in the matter of the Saints’ readiness to complete what they had begun some time earlier—namely, the Gentile collection (see 9:10–11). Paul’s confidence in their fulfillment of that pledge is central to his discussion here. As he notes, he has already boasted about the Corinthian’s enthusiasm for the project, and that continues to stand at the heart of the Apostle’s concern in 9:3–5. The rub is that their enthusiasm has not produced the results he expected. He reports that his boasting about their initial enthusiasm motivated many among the Macedonians to give, but it is now obvious that the Corinthians do not have the funds ready. If that condition continues, as he notes, he and they will suffer acute humiliation.

Although he assures his readers in 9:1–2 that his confidence in their completing the collection makes his writing to them on that subject superfluous, in 9:3 he gives two reasons why he is doing so. In the first he states his main concern. It is the possible negative outcome of his boasting about the Achaeans to the Macedonians in light of Titus’s very positive report on how the collection was advancing. If, however, the delegation arrived only to find the work unaccomplished, Paul’s confident boasting of these people would become vacuous (*κενώω*, *kenoō*). Indeed, it would undercut the enthusiasm for the collection it originally generated and spoil the Apostle’s reputation thereafter. He immediately moves on to the second reason he is writing: “That,” as he says, “you might be prepared” with everything ready when the delegation arrives. It is only in this way that Paul’s continued boast about the Corinthians will be fully justified.

In 9:4, the Apostle further explains why it is important for him that the Macedonian delegation find the Corinthian Saints well on their way to finishing the collection. It is so that he can avoid being humiliated

(καταισχύνω, *kataischynō*). Given the Greco-Roman culture's concern with face, members of all levels of society were highly concerned about their honor and, therefore, went to rather great measures to avoid shame. In the broader Greek culture, authorities would publish in the Athenian agora the names of those who defaulted on loans or pledges and, thus, bring public shame upon them. Given this background, we can see that the verb Paul uses connotes much more than the modern idea of embarrassment but looks more at being publicly humiliated. For the Apostle, such a position would be untenable, for it would undercut both his authority and his effectiveness. Further, as Paul notes parenthetically and thus kindly, the humiliation would also be borne by the Corinthian Saints as well.

In 9:5, Paul states the third reason he is sending the delegation. While doing so, he makes clear three items: the reason for their trip, what he wants the delegates to accomplish, and his hope that the Saints will give what they promised with the correct attitude. His purpose appears to also be preparing his audience for the instructions that he will give in 9:6–15.

Noteworthy is that at this point he gives his message a theological spin. As he has already indicated, though he has encouraged (*παρακαλέω*, *parakaleō*) Titus and those with him to take up this mission, they have willingly assumed the task and, as a result, acted somewhat as independent agents. Their task is to prepare, in advance of Paul's arrival, "the generous gift" (*εὐλογία*, *eulogia*). The noun nuances the idea of a divine blessing that a righteous person calls down upon someone in need. By using this term, Paul ties the gift to deity. Thus, he puts the Corinthians in the position of acting as God's agents, a task not only heavy with responsibility but also potentially abounding in delight as they act in a godly way in sharing the abundance that God has given them.

Hebrew ethic made alms giving an important duty and also dictated that it be done without grudge. The Christians continued to emphasize the practice. The Apostle will teach this same principle to the Roman Saints (Romans 12:8) in addition to those whom he now addresses. Noteworthy, however, is that his insistence on personal action went against the Jewish norm. That norm dictated that one's social obligation ended with the giving. Because administering such funds was considered in general society a lowly service, many of the middle and upper class viewed it as too menial and undignified for them to be involved in (note Luke 21:1). Paul's teachings counter this idea by showing that Christian giving must involve the whole community in the temporal salvation process but under the direction of apostolic authority.

By asking his audience to act in a godly way, Paul put them in a compromising position if they did not respond. The coming delegation could interpret these Saints' delay as an unwillingness to give due to a stingy or greedy (*πλεονεξία*, *pleonexia*) determination to hold on to their earthly goods. The Apostle assures his readers that he does not want them to be seen in such a negative and unflattering light and therefore asks them to willingly live up to their promise *before he gets there* so that no one would think that they gave only because Paul wrung the money out of them.

9:6

In 2 Corinthians 9:6, Paul uses agricultural imagery to make his point. Though Corinth itself was urban, its general environment was agrarian; therefore, its inhabitants would have related to rural imagery. This imagery would have been especially relevant to the Jewish Christian community due to references in their wisdom literature. The Apostle's point in using such a metaphor is that those who contribute stingily to the collection are like a farmer who is unwilling to sacrifice his grain in the present and, thus, gets but a poor harvest. Or on the other hand, those who contribute fully are like a farmer who willingly sacrifices his grain in the present and thus receives a bounteous harvest in the future.

9:7

In 2 Corinthians 9:7, the Apostle identifies two feelings that should not accompany giving. These are internal reluctance (*ἐκ λύπης, ek lypēs*) and external pressure (*ἐξ ἀνάγκη, ex anangkē*). Further, people should give only as much as they determined in their heart when they initially heard of the opportunity. By placing the seat of motivation in each person's heart, Paul makes giving an individual choice and thus, ideally, precludes both internal and external impositions. In this way, he guards against their losing the spiritual reward.

Guarding against this, the Apostle gives no criteria as to the amount that should be given. Each individual must decide for herself or himself but do so in light of the grace that flows from God. Thus, giving is to be voluntary (8:3), free (9:5), and generous (9:6).

He concludes the verse by paraphrasing a scripture that states, "God blesses a cheerful man and a giver" (Proverbs 22:8 Septuagint, authors' translation). Paul renders it, "God loves a cheerful giver." His rewording is telling. In the Apostle's view, love is God's immediate and active response to those who give cheerfully. Paul's pronouncement does not look to some future relationship with God but to one that is realized with the giving. In the process, the Apostle removes all economic overtones because neither purpose nor amount matter any longer—only the proper attitude matters. Such giving is the door through which the Christian enters into the broad love and goodness of God. Paul seems to have designed his request as a means of motivating the Saints to examine their own reasons for giving. He is not intimating, however, that God's love is exclusive to willing givers. He intends no warning. Rather, he is encouraging his audience to give liberally, not because they were made to feel badly or spurred on by outside pressures but because of God's response toward those who do so.

9:8

In 2 Corinthians 9:8, Paul addresses the possible concern of those who might be fearful that giving would hurt them financially. The Apostle makes a five-fold promissory assertion, highlighted by the repeated use of the term "all" (*πᾶν, pan*), which "emphasizes the comprehensiveness and ultimacy of God's goodness." His response centers on God's ability to give the faithful a superabundance (*περισσεύω, perisseuō*)

of what they need, the verb suggesting an amount that not only fills up but overflows. What God is able to lavish on cheerful givers is “all kinds of grace” (*πᾶσαν χάριν, pasan charin*), the phrase referring, in this case, to everything that the Corinthian Saints need so that they can make a generous contribution to the Jewish poor. In other words, the gift of grace is God’s way of enabling these people to give generously to the plea for help. Paul’s admonition shows that God blesses people so that they can do what they desire. They are not, as Paul warns, to glut themselves on God’s gifts but to use the resources He provides to promote “every good work” (*πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθόν, pan ergon agathon*). In this we see the practical application of the Lord’s command that includes a promise, “Seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness and all these things shall be given to you” (Matthew 6:33, authors’ translation; compare 3 Nephi 13:33).

Lest his readers misunderstand his admonition and expect too much, Paul stresses that what God actually gives is “enough” or “a sufficient amount” (*αὐτάρκεια, autarkeia*) to do the needed work. Two points grow out of Paul’s use of this term. First, the emphasis is on sufficiency of a specific kind. Both the Stoics and Cynics at the time stressed the virtue of self-sufficiency as a means of obtaining moral superiority. Paul rejects this idea and replaces it with divine sufficiency, through which the Father provides all the resources that the Saint needs to accomplish the work at hand. Thus, Paul’s focus is on God’s sufficiency, not humankind’s, as the means of accomplishing God’s work. Second, this kind of sufficiency is neither self-centered nor consumerist but stresses generous giving to assist others.

Paul’s promise, we must stress, is not that of an elaborate lifestyle but is enough to perform beyond adequacy every good work. Indeed, the larger context of Paul’s encouragement that God gives sufficiently in all things and at all times should not be taken to mean that the Apostle believes the Saints will never suffer from want or need. The Apostle has made it very clear that suffering, including the want for temporal goods, comes hand in glove with being a Christian. The point is that God did compensate the giving but did so in His own way and according to His own timetable. By this means, He promoted (and still promotes) the need for the continual expression of faith, the end blessing of which will not be fully realized until one is made pure and enters into the rest of the Lord.⁴

9:9–10

To shore up his point, in 2 Corinthians 9:9, Paul again turns to scripture. Likely because it states exactly what he wants, he quotes part of the Septuagint’s Psalm 111:9 (112:9 in the King James Version) verbatim. The whole psalm is an acrostic poem that celebrates the acts of the Godlike person who uses riches in accordance with divine dictates. The poem highlights the person’s generosity, noting that they disperse or scatters (*σκορπίζω, skorpizō*) their goods widely. Their lavish giving is a disclosure of an inherent righteousness (*hē dikaiosynē*; compare Matthew 6:1–4), a characteristic that because it is at the heart of the person’s being, will remain with them forever and thus assure them of an eternal place with God.

As is his wont, Paul repurposes the scripture so that it points not to the deeds and attributes of the righteous person but to those of God. In 9:10, the Apostle plays off the word meaning “to disperse, scatter”

(σκορπίζω, *skorpizō*) to transition to horticultural imagery once again. He notes that God provides both the source (seed) and product (bread) for the faithful sower, suggesting that He will never run out of either. Paul's design is to have his readers focus on the abundant blessings that come to the individual who gives to the poor (πένης, *penēs*).

9:11–12

In 2 Corinthians 9:11 the Apostle transitions from his emphasis centering on God's vast resources and bounteous giving that both encourage and supply the Saint's generosity to that generosity's results. He begins by stating that God will "enrich [the givers] in every way," making it possible for them to give liberally and thus enhance their righteousness. But the benefit to them does not stop there. In 9:11–12, he notes that it will produce among the beneficiaries an overflowing (περισσεύω, *perisseuō*) gratitude (εὐχαριστία, *eucharistia*) to God. In other words, they should understand that their deed is an expression of their faith in and response to God's power that rests upon them. The result of their understanding of how the process works is the production of deep and heartfelt gratitude.

9:13

In 2 Corinthians 9:13, the Apostle elaborates on this point. He states that because of the Greek Saints' generosity, the Jewish Saints will express their gratitude by giving glory to God. Their praise will be generated for two reasons. First, because the recipients of the gift will recognize it as an expression of the Corinthians' obedience to the covenant that they made when accepting the gospel and, second, because they will recognize the gift, as Paul notes, as an expression of the "surpassing grace of God that rests upon" their fellow Saints.

An element of the Apostle's theology woven into this part of the instructions must not be overlooked. Describing what will happen as a result of the Corinthian Saints' generosity, Paul states that Jewish Saints will express gratitude *to God*. Though they will neither forget nor discount the generous gift from their Greek brothers and sisters, they will nonetheless view their fellow travelers as but vehicles of God's work, and therefore they will give all praise appropriately to Him. In sum, for the Apostle, it is the gift of God working through the Corinthians that is significant.

9:14–15

In 2 Corinthians 9:14, Paul identifies another result of the Achaean's generous giving: the Jerusalem Saints will both pray for and yearn to be connected with their generous benefactors because they wish to partake of the divine grace that sits so fully upon the Achaean Saints. Due to the wondrous and enabling power of this grace and what it brings about, it is little wonder that in 9:15 Paul exclaims, "Thank God for his indescribable gift!"

2 Corinthians 10

2 Corinthians 10 is Paul's opening salvo against his enemies. It reveals that a fierce and toxic spiritual battle is fully underway. Paul declares that his critics have misread him and the force of his ministry, misunderstanding that his seeming weakness is actually the strength that follows Christlike, powerful meekness. To push his attack, Paul uses the language of warfare, assuring his audience that the boldness of his letters will be matched by the power of God he will display upon his arrival. The result will be punishment for the impenitent. His words reveal a harsh indignation and an assertion of authority pushed to the uttermost. To put his seeming threats in their proper context, however, he assures his readers that his boldness is an attempt not at intimidation but at protecting their spiritual welfare. Their only proper course of action, he insists, is to submit fully to his leadership.

With skill, irony, sarcasm, parody, and persuasion in his excellent defense (*ἀπολογία, apologia*), Paul answers the charges brought against him. He does this primarily by quoting phrases and catchwords used by his enemies but reminding them, giving them a novel twist taking two forms: applying them in a fresh context or modifying their intent through a play on words.

The last section of the epistle (chapters 10–13) begins with such a sharp break with the subject matter, style, and tone of the earlier parts of the epistle that some scholars argue that it was not part of the original letter but was added later on. But because earlier portions of the letter clearly indicate that Paul is well aware that he has enemies working among the Corinthian Saints (for example, see 6:14–7:4), it is most likely that we have the letter as he originally dictated it. The question is how to account for the difference in tone and style. It is possible that during the period when Paul was dictating the letter, bitter news came from Corinth stating his enemies were gaining ever more support. If so, at this point in his dictation, he fully turned his attention to respond to the news and with an overflowing fervor dictated his defense in such a way as to give his readers a hard knock and bring them to their senses. It is also possible that Paul deliberately designed the epistle as it stands, thus saving his skillfully developed and biting polemic against his enemies for the last portion of the letter. In doing so, he gives his defense and warning with such a solid punch that should have brought his readers to sensibility. Either way, there is little doubt that he realizes his intent.

10:1–2

One of Paul's challenges was to respond to the popular belief in the Greco-Roman world in physiognomy, the idea that an individual's character could be judged based upon his or her appearance and actions, especially bodily comeliness and physical grace. The charge by Paul's critics that he was physically deficient and, as a result, not a proper leader was likely based on assumptions of this belief system. Those of this party used some physical deformity or persistent medical condition with which he was afflicted as their platform. For them, his humble demeanor was a visible signal of shame and humiliation while his physical weakness signified a morally suspect person (2 Corinthians 10:1, 10). As a result, both Paul's conduct and physical condition hampered his message.

Rather than letting these classical stereotypes get in his way, however, the Apostle opted to fill these and similar terms with positive meaning by associating them with Jesus's earthly life and the Apostle's own conformity to Christ and Him crucified. His response to his enemies' criticism reveals his perception that the weakness in his own body actually reflects his understanding of the nature of the mortal Jesus, who could also be seen as lacking physiognomic perfection. Thus, he defused his detractors' arguments by teaching a corrected vision of what Christianity really is.

He begins this section with a formal introduction, "I Paul myself." In doing so, he is likely not discounting Timothy as coauthor but rather emphasizing that he is now speaking on his own authority—that being apostolic, the major issue in this last section of the epistle.

In 10:1, we obliquely hear the disparaging remarks of Paul's enemies who accuse him of being twofaced. One face, they say, reveals itself through the letters he writes. These epistles show him to be bold, even arrogant and intimidating. The other reveals itself in his demeanor when he is with them. It shows him to be humble, modest, but in their estimation, actually pathetic. Thus, his deportment made him appear weak.

The Apostle counters these attacks by attributing to himself virtues associated with the Lord—namely, humility and gracious forbearance. By doing so, Paul turns seeming weaknesses into Christian strengths. The first virtue, according to the Greek Old Testament, carried the strong nuance of submissiveness to divine will, a point the Apostle clearly wants to make. The second virtue suggested a willingness to make allowances even when reason might ask for a different reaction. By appealing to these virtues, Paul clearly takes upon himself not only the attributes of the Master but also His authority. In addition, he shows a high level of goodwill toward his detractors. In essence, what Paul is doing is showing that despite his antagonists' arrogance and disputations, his scorned humility will not allow him to bring this Christlike virtue to bear against them. All this clearly plays into Paul's hands by allowing him, properly, to be the good guy and strengthens his position against those who have bought into the perspective of the world around them.

10:3

Paul's writings reveal that he is being criticized by a number of people. Therefore, his defense has to be broad in order to defuse the opposition against him. To be effective in his efforts and role as a witness of Christ, the Apostle uses two images to catch and hold his readers' attention. His use of the verb "to wage war" (*strateuō*) in 2 Corinthians 10:3 is revealing because it shows how he views the current situation and his antagonists. It suggests that from his point of view, what is happening is not some little spat or a temporary if solid skirmish regarding the principle of agency. It is a full-scale civil war with much at stake—that is, doctrinal issues and leadership authority.

10:4

The Apostle's construction of 2 Corinthians 10:4 shows that he is mounting a full-scale offensive. With the help of Christian truths that he describes as God enhanced weapons, he states his battle plan

of attacking and demolishing the bulwarks of the human sophistry that has so beguiled his opponents and those among their target audience and has led all these to place undue confidence in false and highly worldly values and precepts. On this basis they launched their attack against the Apostle. He, however, refuses to justify himself by countering their major objections to him. In short, in this and the following chapters, we do not find a self-defense. The real debate, as he presents his argument, has nothing to do with him personally. It rather centers on the gospel that Paul has already defined as “the word of the cross” (1 Corinthians 1:18).

10:5

In 2 Corinthians 10:5, the Apostle reveals the nature of his attack. It is to utterly destroy everything that rises up in rebellion against the knowledge of God. The imagery is that of ramparts built to withstand a siege against a stronghold. Having secure battlements was essential to survival during a defensive war. Therefore, these walls were designed to withstand strong opposition and, unless the enemy had overwhelming numbers, worked very well. Context suggest that the imagery looks to arguments and positions taken by the Apostle’s detractors. Paul declares that their position, clearly seen, is not an attack on the Apostle himself but rather actual rebellion against a correct understanding of God and His plan of salvation that the Apostle has been commissioned and empowered to proclaim.

The image of strong, high, seemingly impregnable ramparts underscores the strength and might of the God-empowered weapons those with his authority wields. Paul has already made it clear to the Corinthian Saints that his methods were not those used by even the brightest of men but were “the convincing proof of the Spirit and of power” (2:4 BYUNR). The gospel, as he makes clear, has come via revelation, not through reasoned arguments or philosophical enlightenment.

10:6

In 2 Corinthians 10:6, the Apostle concludes his siege metaphor by declaring what he will do once he has demolished to bits the towering walls and destroyed the errant thinking they protect. The new objective is to take prisoners. In this case it is every mind that opposes a true knowledge of God. Against such minds he will mete out punishment so as to destroy every act of disobedience to the present leadership. He clearly states his purpose is not to destroy thinking but to bring it into obedience to Christ, denoting conformance to the gospel as taught by the Apostle.

Paul stands ready to act as soon as he arrives in Corinth. If he has to do so, he will display for all to see the comprehensive nature of his apostolic authority. But he will not unleash his full authority until certain conditions have been met—namely, that his audience has been obedient to his request that they deal with the troublemakers themselves. The point is that only after the leaders and others have brought themselves in line and then tried and failed to do the same with the others will the Apostle act against the

recalcitrant. Either through self-discipline or the heavy use of apostolic authority, hopefully the whole Church will be unified under apostolic direction.

10:7–11

Second Corinthians 10:7–11 breaks up easily into four primary thoughts, but it takes some unpacking to piece together Paul’s logic as he moves from one point to the next. The first point (10:7a) demands that readers accept what is clearly before their eyes. The second (10:7b) calls for the Apostle’s antagonists to consider in a more accurate way Paul’s relationship to the Savior. The third (10:8) declares that he will not be ashamed of boasting in the exercise of his apostolic authority in relation to the Corinthian Saints even if it seems overbearing to some. The fourth (10:11, mirroring the language of 10:7) affirms that the way he will act when he comes among them will match the power and severity of his letters unless conditions dictate otherwise. With the repetition of the verb translated “ponder” in 10:7 and 10:11, Paul uses what is called an *inclusion*, or bracketed structure to tie this subsection of chapter 10 together. All four parts affirm one idea: the reality of Paul’s apostolic authority.

With 10:7, Paul shifts his argument from his determination to bring all to Christ to a defense of his authority to do so. Though he addresses his argument against “a certain one,” the context suggests he is actually referring to a group. These could be either those who compose the local opposition or the interlopers who have come from outside the area. His detractors accuse him of not being a Spirit-empowered minister, insisting rather that he is a mere man working in human ways. The text shows that these people had convinced many, based on their presumptive claim that they work by and under Christ’s authority, that they have the right to direct the local Church. This position fits well with both the flow of the argument and the general theme of the epistle as a whole.

Whichever group this is, it is clear that they have laid the claim that Paul is not truly of Christ. The meaning of the phrase is important. It appears to be a catchphrase bantered about by this segment of the Christian community in Corinth who claim special relationship to the Lord. Their stance is clearly that they have either a special relationship with or authority from Jesus.

The Apostle, however, adds yet another reason why he should be accepted as a fellow faithful Saint and empowered Christian leader. It is based simply on accepting what all these people should clearly see if they will but open their eyes. It is the obvious and undeniable success of the Church which he himself—albeit through the power of his legitimate apostolic authority—has organized, taught, and led. That alone, he insists, should prove that he does not, as some maintain, walk in worldly ways. But he uses the power of Christ to build His Church and effect positive change in the lives of the Saints. In this defense, we see the real issue. Whichever party is attacking Paul, they are putting him in a position in which he has to defend not his relationship with Christ but his apostolic authority.

It is evident that Paul’s greatest fear is that his work in Corinth will come to naught if his competitors win the battle for the allegiance of the Saints. “At risk is not only Paul’s apostolic credibility but his entire

Gentile mission in the Aegean region, with its headquarters at Corinth. If this church is lost to him, his entire work is in jeopardy—as is his prospect of a future mission in the west (Rome, Spain), to say nothing of his task of getting the [Gentile] collection to Jerusalem.”⁵

With 10:8 the topic is Paul’s apostolic boasting in his Christ-given authority. Indeed, the issue centers on appropriate versus inappropriate boasting. Thus, Paul must make sure he clarifies his position so that he will not be justifiably accused of unseemly self-promotion. Thus, he formulates his argument so that all understand that his boasting serves to uphold not himself but his apostolic authority.

Paul clearly identifies his authority as Christ-derived (10:8) and therefore used to promote the Savior’s ends. The thrust of this and the following verses shows that from Paul’s point of view, his work, even if it is directed at the demolition of human wisdom, is constructive. It is not him but ultimately his opponents who destroy. His God-given assignment and power are for a specific purpose: to build up the Saints and not tear them down.

As background to Paul’s argument in 10:9–10, the New Testament shows that Church leaders, especially after the important Jerusalem Council in AD 49, turned to letters as means of communicating to the far-flung branches of the Church. Given the number of his preserved letters, Paul was especially adept at using this method and wrote with a high degree of frequency. His writings expose his personal and even intimate knowledge of the people and situations of the branches he wrote to. They also expose Paul’s acute awareness that his letter’s recipients were vulnerable to apostate forces and ideas promulgated by countermissionary activity. Thus, the forces of apostasy did not come so much from external pressure as from internal corruption and rebellion.

The historical situation, captured in 10:9–10, shows that his enemies put a negative spin on the Apostle’s letter writing. They insinuated that “Paul chose the safety of distance rather than a personal encounter [10:1, 7] with them in the setting of Paul’s congregations.”⁶ Though on the surface, the description of Paul’s letter as “weighty and strong” could be taken in a very favorable light, context suggests otherwise. In a negative light, we see that his disparagers were insinuating that his letters were stern, boastful, imperious, and uncompromisingly bold, even widely reckless (10:12). Thus, their statement was nothing short of damning sarcasm.

10:12–18

Paul now turns to the misuse of boasting, of which his critics are guilty (2 Corinthians 10:12–18). He insists that it is they who work according to human standards, gain legitimization only through self-comparison, and boast most inappropriately. By doing so, the Apostle offers tantalizing insights into the accusations and activities of this intractable group. Given textual evidence, it would appear that his focus is not on native Corinthian Saints but on interlopers who have come from outside the area.

Just in what the interlopers centered their boast is unclear, but it led them to claim both superiority over Paul and the authority to administer the affairs of the local Church. The Apostle, however, shows

that they have clearly intruded into an area that does not belong to them and in so doing have greatly overreached any prerogatives they might have. The text suggests that these people have made the claim that the Apostle has no real jurisdiction over the Corinthian Saints, thus he has no authority over what the people do. Further, he evidences no charismatic powers and thus God does not appear to be with him. Of themselves, they have brought both the necessary credentials and the Spirit.

In 10:12, with heavy irony, Paul turns his attention to a defense against his detractors by stressing both the inappropriate nature and ground of their boasting through which they evidence their superiority. Paul notes he would not presume or dare to put himself in such a self-important position (compare Romans 1:18; Jude 9). That is not to say he is unwilling to boast. Indeed, he is very willing to use bold confidence against these antagonists (10:2), but he refuses to join in their game of self-promotion. Let them think he is weak, an abysmal public speaker (10:10), and beneath them in other respects, but he will prove himself more fit than they. Ironically, he agrees he should not go head-to-head with these braggarts. His read on the situation, however, differs radically from theirs and, as he will show, vindicates him in every respect. Because of this, he refuses to enter into a game of comparison.

In 10:13, the Apostle distinguishes between true and false boasting: The latter goes beyond what is proper and correct while the former rests exactly on three strictures. These consist of following the doctrine as declared by Paul and his associates, being faithful to the Lord, and being in accord with apostolic authority. Thus, Paul feels justified in openly boasting because he does so according to the criteria God has set down, which shows that proper boasting rests on commendation from deity alone. Of note is that what Paul is doing for Corinthian Christianity parallels what the Lord did for the Judaic community. Both criticized much of the cultural expectations of their respective societies and revealed a new and better way.

Paul builds on his negative assertion in 10:13 by making another in 10:14. In the former case he insisted that his boasting was not out of bounds. In 10:14, he insists that neither is his sphere of ministry out of bounds. He had earlier received twofold authority for his claim, either of which or both could be at play here. The first was the direct assignment from the Lord Himself that Paul work among the Gentiles (Acts 26:16–18). The second was the confirmation of this assignment at the conclusion of the Jerusalem Council in AD 49 (Acts 15:10–35; Galatians 2:1–9). To make his point, Paul repeats his position that he is not guilty of overreaching because his sphere of authority extends as far as Corinth. His seat of proof is that he was the first to bring the gospel of Christ to these people. Thus, his detractors have, without proper authority, moved into his field of ministry and are but “interlopers and usurpers of apostolic prerogative” and, further, have brought with them heterodox teachings.⁷

In 10:15, Paul continues his insistence that he has not boasted beyond proper limits or unfairly. He emphasizes his point by repeating the phrase he used in 10:13 verbatim but then adding the words “in the work done by others.” His argument is that he has never poached on areas of missionary work opened by fellow missionaries. But such poaching is exactly what the interlopers have done by trying to capture his ministry for themselves.

Next Paul expresses his expectation that once the Corinthian Saints' confidence has been restored in him, they will assist him in using their area as a launching pad for his intended mission to points west, where his field of labor, he feels, will be "greatly enlarged." As a result, he will continue to be free of boasting—that is, of intruding into areas where others have already worked. The phrase suggests that Paul views prior and original work in a field of labor as rightly determining who had authority over it and that this authority should not be broached by others. Behind that is the idea that the advancement of the work is under apostolic authority as directly assigned by the Lord (Matthew 28:19–20).

In 10:16, having stated his hope to evangelize the regions beyond Corinth, he immediately returns to his defense and again but obliquely rebuts his opponents' guilt of boasting in what they have not done. He will not boast in (that is, take credit for), as he said in 10:15, the work done by others by encroaching on their field of labor. Noteworthy is that he is true to this position concerning Rome, where he does not open a field of labor because that work was already going on apace, likely due to the efforts of Peter.

In 10:17, Paul begins to bring the train of thought he began in 10:12 full circle and, as is his wont, clinches his point with a scriptural citation. The hook word is *commend*, and the issue is on what basis can a proper commendation and thereby appropriate boasting be made. The basis of the answer is in defining the proper assigned area of influence and its demarcation. Is that sphere determined by human effort wherein the person should receive the commendation or condemnation for what happens, or is it from the Lord, who gives the work validity and who is the only one who can rightly commend the work as "approved"? The scripture Paul paraphrases (Jeremiah 9:22–23 Septuagint) underscores that all boasting must be grounded in the Lord and in an understanding of His ways.

Though he could claim the title of sage, Paul shows that he will follow Jeremiah's warning and therefore "boast in his foolishness, weakness, and poverty." But by this means, as shown in 10:18, he is again able to ridicule his detractors' method of self-commendation based on their own standards that has resulted in their being, as he states, clueless to the purpose and nature of proper boasting. When all is said and done, ultimate approval does not come from self-commendation but from God. Certainly, true commendation rests only here and boasting can be only in God. Paul has already affirmed that his labor is driven by the grace of God that continually attends him (1 Corinthians 15:10). On that basis, he does not need nor will he engage in self-commendation.⁸

2 Corinthians 11

The eleventh chapter of 2 Corinthians breaks down into five interconnected units. In the first (11:1–4), the Apostle sets forth his reason for entering into the state of "foolish boasting." He requests that his readers, who have borne with the foolish boasting of the interlopers, now bear with his own. In the second (11:5–15), he addresses the accusations of those whom he calls super-apostles, comments on his pattern of ministry, and berates their deceitful character. In the third (11:16–21), he repeats themes from the first

section as he uncomfortably enters into his “fool’s speech,” in which he parodies his readers’ willingness to put up with the foolish boasting of his critics. In the fourth (11:22–29), he finally begins his own boasting, listing his heritage, sacrifices, and work for the kingdom. In the fifth (11:30–33), he confirms that despite all he has done, the seat of his glorying will be in his infirmities. He goes on to testify to the truthfulness of his position. He concludes the unit with a recount of a most embarrassing event that took place shortly after his conversion when he had to escape arrest by being lowered over a wall in a large net.

11:1–6

This section of Paul’s writing begins with an asyndeton, a sudden break in thought that carries no direct connection with what came before. As a result, the transition between the argument that ends chapter 10 and that which opens chapter 11 is very abrupt. That abruptness, however, serves Paul well, for the moderate jar causes the thoughtful reader and listener to pay attention to what comes next.

In 11:1, Paul uses the pejorative noun “foolishness” (*ἀφροσύνη, aphrosynē*) as a bold self-criticism of what he is about to do. It is in light of the circumstances in which he finds himself, however, that he is forced to set himself up not on the spiritual plane where he would like to be but on the carnal where, as he will show, both his antagonists and his audience reside. Because his audience has been less than supportive of his apostolic office, they have forced him to take on a very foolish posture (12:1, 11). In his efforts, the Apostle comes very close to boasting according to human standards (*κατὰ σάρκα, kata sarka*) of which he accuses his enemies of being guilty. Their guilt lies in a boast that focuses on their accomplishments and failed to give credit (and, likely, the realization) of the roles of God and Christ in their work (10:12–13; 11:18–19).

Interestingly, Paul uses the term *foolishness* as it applies to him in both an ironic and factual way: ironically because he is actually ridiculing both his detractors and his audience throughout this portion of his epistle and by so doing exposes and parodies their own foolishness, and factually because what he boasts about are very real events and accomplishments that he does not exaggerate.

In 11:2, Paul states the double reason why he is acting as he does. The first reason is his strong personal feelings of affection for these people. To express these feelings, the Apostle uses the verb “to be jealous” (*ζηλόω, zēloō*). The term must be stripped of its modern sense by connecting it to the theme of God’s covenantal care for His people.⁹ In Paul’s sense, the word connotes the intense care, even zeal, that God has for His children and that the godly have for their spiritual brothers and sisters.

Paul next states the second reason why he is acting as he does. It centers on his work in uniting these people with God. To put his point over, Paul imagines himself as the father of a bride whose purity he is protecting as she prepares herself for marriage. To be absolutely clear, however, Paul identifies the person he wants these people to be united to is the Lord, Jesus Christ. By using this analogy, Paul clears himself of all personal benefit. His total efforts have been and still are keeping the Saints sufficiently pure in the conduct of their lives and the purity of their doctrine that they stand united with their Savior.

He, however, does not hesitate to chastise them in their pure folly in being so easily, perhaps even anxiously, bewitched by the interlopers. In 11:4, he identifies his second reason for the zeal he feels of these Saints. Setting aside the metaphor of the caring father, he identifies the specific dangers the Corinthians face. These consist of an abandonment of the understanding of Christ, His gospel, and even the workings of the Spirit that Paul had taught them. Just what the different and aberrant Christ, gospel, and Spirit were the text does not reveal. There were, during this period (and even centuries after), various speculations circulating that may have surfaced among the Corinthian Saints. Four are noteworthy: those professed by the Gnostics, Docetists, Ebionites, and Judaizers.

In 11:5, Paul expresses his second reason for a willingness to act the fool. The first was his zeal for the wellbeing of these Saints (11:1). This one is to show them that he regards himself as in no way inferior to his detractors despite their self-proclaimed expertise and self-adulation. With a phrase dripping with irony, Paul refers to these self-assured, influential but destructive interlopers as super-apostles. He uses the adverb *ὑπερλίαν* (*hyperlian*), “super,” to stress their supposed exalted position. The modern colloquial expression *super-duper* catches the force of Paul’s satire. His personal self-assurance, on the other hand, rests upon his view of the success of his ministry and reflects his careful consideration and appreciation of his God-given skills in correctly and powerfully carrying out that ministry.

Paul begins 11:6 with a concession to his detractors that his speaking proficiency is somewhat lacking. The noun he uses (*ιδιώτης*, *idiotēs*), rendered here as “private” and therefore “unskilled,” refers to a person who is inexpert or amateurish in a field of knowledge because it is not often practiced in public.

Paul’s defense at this point suggests that the Apostle is actually not totally unskilled in public speaking but refuses to show off by using the empty and self-promoting eloquence and disingenuous ornamental style displayed by many contemporary Sophists. His skill at argument, as captured in his letters, clearly evidences a solid knowledge of the art and, therefore, his admission to a lack is less to an actual skill and more to a refusal to yield to the public’s demand and expect use thereof. Thus, his humble admission is likely a bit tongue in cheek in order to demonstrate his pure motives.

His point is that even if his preaching lacks the eloquence of some, he is in no way guilty before God. Such guilt, however, could rest on any who, no matter how well they spoke, were ignorant of the ways of God and, thereby, did not declare the means of salvation. It is not eloquence that commends his message but the power it has to save.

11:7–15

The central issue of Paul’s defense in this pericope is his refusal to accept patronage or other forms of assistance from any of the Corinthian Saints (1 Corinthians 9:6–18). As a result, some insisted that because he did this, he was not a true Apostle. Their claim was based on the Lord’s command that this group was to minister the gospel through the generosity of the people (Matthew 10:8–10; Luke 10:7).

In 11:7, Paul challenges that idea by asking if he is guilty of sinning and thus having to endure the penalty that such causes just because he acted with humility, even debasement (*tapeinoō*) in refusing payment for his declaration of the gospel. In doing so, he uses bitter irony. We see the force of that irony in his emphasis that it was God’s gospel—not any teaching or skill arising from his own merits—that he preached freely.

Paul does not hide the fact that as a servant of the Lord who is preaching full time, he could legitimately ask for and receive support (1 Corinthians 9:4–6, 14). So why did he not? In short, because he did not want anything to hinder the furtherance of the spread of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:12). His writings allow us to see his concerns. First, he could not be bound to the direction, desires, or whims of a patron. Second, he did not want such a financial burden to become an obstacle in peoples’ acceptance of the gospel.¹⁰ He, therefore, had to declare it without personal cost to them. Third, he feels that preaching the gospel freely carries its own reward (1 Corinthians 9:17) and, thus, he feels fully compensated for his efforts. Fourth, it allows him to express a Christlike grace that all could see and hopefully be drawn to and imitate (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1). Finally, he views himself as the slave (*δοῦλος*, *doulos*) of Christ (Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:10), and as such, he is not to be paid for doing what that obligated.

As Paul states in 11:8, he readily accepted assistance from the Macedonian Saints (2 Corinthians 11:9). That he refers to that assistance as an act of robbery (*συλλάω*, *sylaō*) reveals the height of his irony and gives a glimpse of his acute frustration with the local Saints. It also sets the nature of his reception of those funds apart from that which the Corinthians might give, thus, disallowing a comparison. And he really rubs it in. Though it may be painful, what he did was *for them*—he brought the gospel for them and he preached it for them and he sustained it for them, and he did it free of charge.

But why take from the northern Saints and not from the Corinthians? Likely it was for pragmatic reasons. The situation in Corinth was not the same as in, for example, Philippi. Paul was no longer living in that city; therefore, any funds they gave, he would not be using for their direct benefit. Even so, they were willing to give in order to support the extension of his missionary efforts beyond their city. Further, he enjoyed a strong bond of fellowship (*koinonia*) with these Saints. Both of these conditions allowed him to accept their support without feeling obligated to them.

In 11:9, Paul does three things: he explains exactly how he lowered or humbled himself, how he “robbed” other Churches, and how careful he was not to be burden to anyone in Corinth. The context he presents suggests that early in his ministry among the Corinthians, he found himself in acute need (*hystereō*), likely because he had run out of personal funds and had not yet found employment. Even so, he went out of his way not to be burdensome (*katanarkeō*) to anyone there. He referred to this as lowering or humbling himself. Fortunately, his needs were met by a party that came from Macedonia, most likely Philippi (Philippians 4:14). Accepting the donation, he notes, is how he “robbed” other churches. The party probably consisted of Silas and Timothy, who joined him early in his Corinth mission (2 Corinthians 1:1, 19). The funds they brought from the Macedonian Saints allowed Paul the needed time to

establish his independence. In that way, he was able to avoid falling under a patron-client relationship and any charge of exploitation. He concludes the sentence by noting that his stance on this issue will not change during his upcoming visit. He will maintain his independence at all costs.

To emphasize his point, he begins the next sentence with a strong oath testifying that “Christ’s truth is in me” (11:10). That truth is undeniably the seat of all that Paul does, including his insistence in being dependent on no one when it comes to preaching the gospel. That gospel centers on Christ’s truth as given to the Apostle from his first encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus and through the course of his ministry. The one salient truth is that Christ lives and continues to minister through His chosen leaders.

In 11:11–12, Paul first heads off a misguided explanation as to why he preaches the gospel free of charge and then explains why he feels compelled to continue to do so. He begins with the rhetorical question, “Why? Because I do not love you?” His assurance may have arisen from complaints that he accepted support from Macedonia, thus showing his love for those Saints, but by rejecting assistance from the Corinthian Saints, he was showing no love for them. Here he reassures them of his genuine care for them. To stress his point, he uses his second oath, “God knows that I do.” His appeal is based on God’s full knowledge of the hearts and minds of people and, therefore, the Apostle’s desires, intents, and motives. No matter what cultural or social appearances may dictate, God knows the true state of Paul’s heart. The Apostle now must win over the Corinthians’ hearts. His aim is not to win at the cost of their loss but to have all win together in Christ.

His actions are based in no way on favoritism but on love. That his accusers (both those local and those who arrived later) would impute a lack of love on Paul’s part is quite remarkable given what we know of them. In none of Paul’s writings does there appear a notice that these people have shown any love for him or any group beyond their own circle. There is even doubt of their love for one another.

In 11:12, he states the explicit reasons why he will continue to refuse any wages for his ministerial labors so that any attempt to put pressure on him would be deflected before he ever arrived. The sentence breaks down into three parts. In the first Paul declares his stance (“I will continue doing as I have done”); second, he explains his purpose (“that I might undercut the ground from those who seek a basis”); and in the third, he expands on why he will do the undercutting (“because they seek to boast that they are equal to us”). Paul’s point appears to be that he will continue to refuse payment for his preaching because it will undercut the claim of those who insist they are his equal. Paul is using the verb here figuratively, explaining that he will not give his enemies (the false apostles of the next verse) the occasion or opportunity (*ἀφορμῇ, aphormē*) to claim that they have accomplished the same thing he and his companions have.

The point of the long phrase is simply that the interlopers are seeking to become Paul’s equals. In sum, they are claiming that they minister in the same way he does but with more effect (compare 10:10). By not taking pay, Paul draws the stark line between his methods and intents of ministry and theirs. The Apostle clearly sets off his position from his opposers and thereby emphasizes a total lack of equality.

Paul's statement in 11:13 gives his reason for refusing to allow the interlopers an opportunity to meet their claim that their ministry is on an equal footing to his own. He clearly sets the issue on authority—who has the right to administer in the area and set the doctrine. He bluntly rejects their claim to both by describing them by two very strong epithets. The first is false apostles (*ψευδαπόστολοι, pseudapostoloi*). The disparaging term is found only here in the New Testament and appears to be coined by Paul. In his view they are false because they lack the proper authorization of Christ, preach a different gospel, promote a different spirit, proclaim another Jesus, and trespass into the Gentile mission field without authorization in order to usurp Jesus's command to preach the gospel in all the earth (11:4; compare 1:1). He next calls them deceitful workers (*ἐργάται δόλιοι, ergatai dolioi*), the term denoting a lack of allegiance to the Christian way and connoting a certain treacherousness in what they do, because they present a hidden danger.

In 11:14, Paul explains how this masquerade has and continues to go on. He introduces his point with the striking and irony-filled statement “and no wonder!” The phrase “serves as a strident call to be alert.”¹¹ And to what? That the interlopers are following the pattern of their true master, Satan, who when it serves his purpose, disguises himself as an angel of light. These men, as Paul insists in 11:15, are the devil's ministers (*diakononoi autou*) but masquerade as servants of righteousness. Paul's charges against them are clear: promoting false doctrine, distorting the nature and work of Christ (11:4), attacking God's true Apostle, bearing false witness against him, and intruding into his area of missionary work (11:4, 18–20).

Paul closes this section (in 11:15) by giving a stiff warning to his readers about the fate of these people. “Their end,” he says simply, “will be the result of their deeds.” The implication is that God's judgment upon them will be severe due to their dissembling.

11:16–18

In 2 Corinthians 11:16–18, the deep sense of the embarrassment that Paul feels because he has been put in this position clearly comes through. The Apostle shows that he is being forced into the absurd and worldly behavior of boasting because his audience glories in that which is worldly, showy, and smacking of shamelessness. He hints of surprise that they are willing to adhere to those who flaunt these vices, but he knows why. The clever Corinthians, as he calls them, being fools themselves “have submitted to the reckless claims of [other] fools.” In order to reclaim these Saints, he apologizes, he must stoop to the level of these other fools. He insists that will surpass them in speaking with human folly by cataloging his suffering and sacrifices for the Church. Of note is that, once again, the irony he uses is not actually foolishness but states the truth.

That he refers to the scope of the boasting he will undertake as “but a little bit” when juxtaposed with the length of his report that follows (11:21–12:10) suggests and even underscores (though partially veiled) the magnitude of what the Apostle has been and continues to go through for the Lord's kingdom. His sacrifices become the means of shaming his accusers.

By assuming the role of the fool, the Apostle puts himself in a position to accomplish two objectives: the first is to provide himself, as noted above, with the platform from which he can coax, perhaps even cajole, his audience into greater support for him and the gospel he proclaims. The second is to provide him with the means of lampooning his opponents by using their methods. Cleverly, he actually turns their ploy on its head by boasting not of his strength but of his weakness. His use of this tactic is brilliant because it gives him the means of pushing his objective of centering everything not on himself but on the Lord yet still stressing his own authority as Jesus's Apostle.

In 11:17–18, Paul makes it blatantly clear that what he is about to do—boast—violates the way of God and has nothing divine behind it. He takes this position because boasting's focus is not, as it should be, on the Lord but on individuals who put themselves and their work before that of God to bolster their place before the Saints (2 Corinthians 10:7; Jeremiah 9:23–24). These people manifest themselves in a “trust in outward display and demonstrations of spirit, their reliance on ‘sight,’ . . . and their glorying in ‘the outward.’”¹² Thus, the activity is according to inappropriate and ungodly human standards. In sum, it is nothing less than foolishness. Paul notes that quite a number have engaged in this practice. Due to their success, he, too, will do what they do, but his not so hidden stratagem is to expose and undo their hybris.

11:19

In 2 Corinthians 11:19, with sustained and acute irony, Paul continues to give his reasons for stooping to the practice of boasting. It is because his readers gladly put up with people who engage in this practice and who have made it nearly into an art form. And why do the Saints do this? (Here Paul's sarcasm nearly drools.) Because they are “wise.” Though the term usually refers to proper insight and understanding and therefore to what is prudent or sensible, the Apostle uses it as a synonym for such foolish thinking that it borders on idiocy. Had these people not been willing to accept the claims of the interlopers, their efforts would have fallen flat, and therefore the Saints must share in the blame of pushing the Apostle into doing the absurd.

11:20

Having established why he is forced into this humiliating position, the Apostle exposes just how ridiculous the rather docile stand taken by the Corinthian Saints really is. In 11:20, using a driving repetitive rhythm composed of five conditional clauses, the Apostle details the ways his detractors have abused the local congregations. First, they have reduced certain members to the status of slave such that these Saints unquestioningly do the interlopers' bidding. Second, they have exploited or taken unfair advantage of the Saints. The verb Paul uses (*κατεσθίω*, *katesthiō*) means “to devour” and therefore exposes the interlopers' voracious appetites through which they unconscionably eat up the resources of the Saints (likely feeling and teaching it was their due). Third, they have taken some captive and in the process pulled them away from the freedom of the gospel and its true ministers. Fourth, they have treated the Saints with ar-

rogance. Fifth, they have even gone so far as to physically abuse some of them by slapping their faces, an act of major humiliation.

From a modern perspective, Paul's charges smack of sheer exaggeration. However, given the times, he likely was not. The interlopers seem to have convinced many of the Saints that their supposed high position granted them rights both to be taken care of and to demean and even punish those who stood in opposition to them.

11:21–27

Paul ends this section of his argument with a mock “confession” (11:21a). In it he acknowledges the shameful state of weakness in which he continually lives, one that has prevented him, unlike the interlopers, from abusing the Corinthian Saints. Paul's confession is, in reality, a brilliant transition into his “fools speech,” for in it he quickly passes through his heritage to what he has endured during the course of his decades old ministry (11:22–27). In doing so, he forces his audience to see clearly his counterculture boasting that focuses on validating weaknesses. In doing so, Paul shows that the antics of his detractors are nothing short of bullying “strength,” evidenced in destructive abuse. In this way, he highlights the stark contrast between the interlopers' harsh and arrogant ways with the kind and loving ways used by him and his companions. His ministry, though modeled on that of the Savior, has been filled not only with patient sacrifice and suffering but also periods of dread and even alarm—all for the sake of the Christ Jesus. Of course, when he confesses to acting “according to weakness,” he means nothing of the kind. Indeed, his ministry and mission has been filled with examples of strong but gentle leadership in ways that authenticate and model Christ and his gospel of love and vividly expose the absolute wrong headedness of the cultural norms that drive pagan society.

To emphasize his recognition of the inanity of what he is about to do, in 11:21, Paul admits, albeit carefully downplayed by making it an aside, that he is taking on the role of a complete fool. Whatever anyone else dares to do, he boasts, he dares to do. Considering that he has admitted to a position of weakness vis à vis the strength of his opponents, going head-to-head with them would certainly be an act of sheer folly, but Paul knows exactly what he is doing. With biting irony, he admits to the condition his opponents ascribe to him: weakness, but a weakness, he says, that expressed itself in being unable to engage in the outrageous behavior as displayed by the interlopers against the Saints. Thus, his admission is actually a condemnation of both the shameful actions of the interlopers and the willingness of some of the Saints to put up with them.

He begins his boast (11:22–23b) with four identity questions followed by an answer for each. These appear to be rejoinders to certain claims made by either the interlopers or their supporters (3:1) and may reflect the qualifications they have foisted off on a gullible audience to substantiate their status as authentic missionaries and leaders.

The first three deal with ethnic identity and seem designed to address the issue of proper breeding. Paul arranges them from general to specific. The first, Hebrews, distinguishes Jews from other people

and shows that this distinction goes back millennia. The second, Israelites, refers to the descendants of Jacob and looks more specifically at the founder of a distinct people with which the Jews highly identified, for they were the “men of Israel.” The third, descendants of Abraham, echoes the covenants made to the great patriarch through which both he and his descendants became the chosen people of God.

In 11:23, Paul addresses what is the most audacious of all the claims that his detractors make: that of being ministers of Christ. The phrase does not refer to being simply servants of the Lord. The term “minister” (*διάκονος*, *diakonos*) refers to one who acts in the capacity of a direct assistant to one of higher rank and thereby exercises his power and authority. The issue is, therefore, one of legitimacy. So important is it that Paul cannot allow such a claim to go unchallenged. It is important to note, however, that his understanding of being a minister of Christ reflects *his* understanding of the nature of the ministry (*διακονία*, *diakonia*), *not theirs*. Paul acts under the Savior’s authority and in the Savior’s way and is willing to show this through the sacrifices he makes. Since the interlopers have made this the test of authenticity, Paul takes them up on it and, in doing so, shows that he is far above them.

Having established, as it were, his credentials so far as breeding is concerned, he now (11:23) launches into a list of his sacrifices and experiences as “a minister of Christ.” He does not presuppose that the extensive list of his hardships that he now relates will actually legitimize him as an Apostle in the eyes of these people. Nor does he believe that it will result in their sympathy. What he wants to do is turn their worldview upside down. To do so, his emphasis is not what he has accomplished for the kingdom but what he has suffered for it.

He first gives a summary of what he has been through, beginning with the least then moving to the more dangerous of his trials. He first refers to the hard physical work that he had to go through both during his travels and his stays with the Saints. He next notes his numerous imprisonments, all arising from false charges and all resulting in his dismissal but nonetheless unpleasant and worrisome. From there he notes he had received so many blows from various punishments that he could not even count them. Finally, he states, so extreme were quite a number of the conditions he faced that he feared for his life.

He saved the most worrisome and grievous danger till the last. It was the threat he faced from false brethren. His reference was likely to more than the interlopers he was now confronting, though they are definitely included. For years he had known and was now seeing the fulfillment of prophecy as apostasy gained force over much of the area. This rebellion or mutiny within God’s kingdom would eventually succeed in pulling the entire Church away from the fullness of the gospel, leaving in its wake the loss of priesthood authority and truths both plain and precious (2 Thessalonians 2:1–3; 2 Nephi 13:21–26). Its leadership would be false brethren. The result would be the destruction of all that Paul suffered, sacrificed, and lived for.

Next (2 Corinthians 11:27), Paul lists a general characterization of the hardships he had experienced that resulted from challenges arising during daily living or the needs of the ministry. Most of these were due to a lack of resources. He notes the hard, burdensome, and unrelenting physical work that his mission, forcing him to toil to the point of exhaustion. However, even though Paul was beaten down with

weariness, his anxiety for the welfare of the branches of the Church often prevented him from getting restful sleep. His work also forced him to travel long distances. During some of these journeys, when villages or towns were few and far between, he and his fellow travelers ran out of water and food. Thus, they were forced to forge on with empty stomachs and thirsty mouths. But the ministry itself required him to go without food and drink as he fasted in behalf of the Church. He also knew biting cold when he was forced to travel in the winter, journey over high mountain passes, and sit shivering in a prison's chilly shackles. During such times he felt the full misery that came with a lack of proper clothing. In sum, his rapid list of hardships emphasizes that his ministry bore tremendous personal cost. Such was for neither the faint of heart nor those given to comfort and leisure. The force of his message in these few verses gave a figurative slap in the face of his detractors who sought the soft and easy life that their demands upon the Church provided.

11:28–29

After his careful listing of the taxing hardships endured for the ministry, in 2 Corinthians 11:28–29 the Apostle reaches the climatic point. Up to this point, Paul has mentioned the various difficulties, adverse circumstances, and hard toil that he has suffered, but never has he mentioned his emotional state. Now he does. He feels intense pressure that expresses itself in unrelenting anxiety for the welfare of these beloved people. Its weight presses upon him not only during daylight hours but also at night, resulting in wearisome sleeplessness. His simple phrase “in addition to these” (referring to catalog of hardships he has endured) acts as a bridge and “serves rhetorically to give the impression that even this varied, extensive account of his ministry challenges does not capture the full picture. The price he has paid to be God’s true minister in the world has been beyond even what has been told here.”¹³

To force his audience to focus on and understand the seat of his oppressive and unrelenting anxiety, in 11:29, he asks two questions: “Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I do not burn with indignation?” The two questions are related. He cares for the weak in the Churches, both those whose testimonies are not yet strong and those with low social status. He identifies especially with the latter, who due to their perceived low status, are being oppressed, abused, and even exploited, especially by the interlopers. One reason for his identification with the oppressed is that his detractors have disdained and abused him because they see him as they see the weak—that is, as one having little social status. Thus, his empathy generates his fiery hot indignation toward the perpetrators.

In his genuine concern, the Apostle has clearly demonstrated for those with eyes to see that his labors and care have more than surpassed all the claims of those who purport superior station among the Saints.

11:30–33

The Apostle ends this portion of his defense by briefly relating a notable tale, one that seems, at first reading, rather odd given the point he has been making. Where before he has focused on the suffering

that he has endured for both Christ and the Lord's community, here he relates an act driven by fear and leading to flight. Rather than being apprehended by the governor of Damascus, Paul chose to flee with the help of friends by being lowered in a net through an opening in the city walls. He had good reason to flee. According to Acts, Paul preached in the synagogues at Damascus with such force and persuasion that he "confounded the Jews" (Acts 9:22). So incensed were some of his hearers that they decided he had to die. Fortunately for them, according to Paul's statement in 11:32 the city's governor was also after the Apostle. Since the governor had influence and resources that the Jews did not, forming a league with him made sense. Thus, the Jews cooperated with this political authority by setting a twenty-four-hour watch at all the gates of the city with the hope of apprehending the Apostle, thus forcing his harrowing escape.

2 Corinthians 12

12:1–10

At this point, Paul begins his next argument. He starts with the statement, "It is necessary to boast." Given his obvious reluctance to engage in such an activity, this statement seems out of character. It is likely, however, that he is not expressing his sentiment but rather quoting a watchword used by the Corinthians. The phrase actually embodies a widely accepted principle followed by many, apparently including some of Paul's opponents. But, if Paul himself sees boasting as having no advantage, why then does he engage in it? This pericope suggests he does so as a polemical device to thwart the position of his enemies who use this very technique to further their cause. For him, boasting is the best way to overcome the mounting opposition. Further, by using their watchword, he undercuts its value while vitalizing his own position as he immediately refers to having his own visions and revelations. Noteworthy is how skillfully Paul adopts this methodology but twists it to make his point: proper boasting leads not to personal glory but to that of God. Thus, the practice does have an efficacious value but only if it focuses on deity. What we must stress here is that Paul, by deflecting praise and glory from himself, turned the Corinthian mindset on its head. Garnering glory for oneself or family was the name of the game that many in most classes played. To deflect that glory to another was unthinkable. But Paul well understood that self-glory could and often did result in a false sense of pride that offended the Spirit and blocked the person from its purifying and empowering influence.

In 2 Corinthians 12:2–4, Paul relates very briefly and indirectly two highly spiritual and informative visionary experiences that he had had in which God not only opened to him the divine realm but also gave him invaluable instructions and understandings.

He, however, does not state directly that he was the one who had such marvelous manifestations. Instead, he obliquely states, "I knew a man who had them." Just why Paul refers to himself in the third person is unclear. That he did so has led some to feel he was not actually talking about himself. One view holds that he was referencing a missionary companion whose experience he admired because Paul

himself was more prone to revelations than to such high and esoteric visions. Another view was that the Apostle was using parody on the claimed visionary experiences of his detractors.

Most scholars reject both ideas and insist that he was referring to himself but expressing his vision in such a way as a means of distancing himself from the event in an effort not to draw undue attention to its importance. This position has the best footing for two reasons. The first is that it fits the context wherein Paul admits that though he does not see it as beneficial, he “will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord.” Second, it serves the purpose of introducing the central subject and the very personal matter of this section, the “thorn in the flesh.”

Reporting on these visions, Paul states simply that in one he was taken up into the “third heaven.” Due to the ambiguity of the phrase and lack of Restoration insights, scholars have speculated on just what Paul was referring to. From the Jewish standpoint of Paul’s day, because the Hebrew noun שָׁמַיִם (*šā-mayim*), “heavens,” is plural, many accepted the idea that there was more than one. The Old Testament supports a threefold heavenly division.¹⁴

Paul’s view, however, focuses on the heavenly realm itself. In his description, he uses the preposition ἕως (*heōs*), “up to, as far as, to,” that denotes reaching the top or upper limit of an object. In this case, that upper limit was the highest degree or celestial realm of heaven. Joseph Smith supported this view, noting that “Paul ascended into the third heavens, and he could understand the three principal rounds of Jacob’s ladder—the telestial, the terrestrial, and the celestial glories or kingdoms, where Paul saw and heard things which were not lawful for him to utter.”¹⁵ It is important also to note that declaring that he had reached the zenith of glory gave the Apostle cachet with his audience, thus allowing him to retain full credibility.

In addition to being raised into the third heaven, Paul was also raised into paradise. The noun is a Persian loan word that referred to an enclosed, nicely kept plot or garden. It is in this light that the celestial garden located eastward in Eden became associated with paradise. Over time, this Edenic state became allied with the spirit world. Also, among the Jews, it came to denote a place of transcendent blessedness where the righteous dead resided.

Though some scholars opine that Paul had but one vision (thus combining the third heaven and paradise), the Restoration perspective is that paradise is a subset of the spirit world that also includes spirit prison.

In sum, paradise is the temporary abode where reside those who made and kept sacred covenants with God during mortality or accepted him fully and received the temple ordinances performed in their behalf while in spirit prison. All these rest from their labors in a state of peace and happiness, waiting for the time when they will receive their full blessing of entering into the celestial world.¹⁶

About the heavenly experiences, Paul adds an aside that when they happened, he did not know if he were in or out of his body. Though but a parenthetical note, this phrase plays an important part in Paul’s intent and reveals where he stood on certain issues. On the one hand, the Apostle does not view the body as depraved or evil, and salvation for him also included the physical element (see 2 Corinthians 5:1–10). Therefore, it could be involved in a revelatory experience. His view ran counter to some of the religions

and philosophical views at the time. These assessments insisted that any divine manifestation, to be valid, had to happen outside or apart from the body. Paul's earlier stated position, however, shows that he rejects this idea. Even so, he likely did not want to invalidate the idea that one could have an out-of-body spiritual experience. In this phrase, Paul retains a neutral tone likely because he really did not know if he was bodily transported into the divine realm or experienced it only through his spirit. Paul clearly believes that the soul has a conscious existence outside the body, but here he leaves the answer to God alone. In doing so, he does not prejudice his account with whatever position members of his audience may take.

But if Paul could not share the information, what value did the communication have? One point is clear—the revelation was for Paul alone. Its intent appears to have been twofold: first, to strengthen him in facing the immense spiritual and physical suffering he would have to endure by providing him with an understanding as to why and, second, to give him a cosmological perspective of the gospel and God's plans that allowed him to view his own work from a more complete perspective. As a result, he could put the emphasis where it belonged.

In sum, these visions gave him an incalculable boost in preparation for his apostolic career, providing him with not only knowledge of the divine will and workings but also with the strength to persevere through disappointment, opposition, hardships, and sacrifices. And more, the knowledge and strength did not end with him alone but outflowed to bless not only his generation but that of all the faithful who followed. It appears, however, that Paul mentioned these two supernal visions not because his spiritual experiences were few but because these were exceptional.

In 12: 5, Paul states that he is most willing to boast about such a one who had such wonderful experiences, but he says he is not willing to boast about himself. In doing so, he seems to present a bit of an enigma. If he is the highly blessed individual who has had these unspeakable and perhaps even unimaginable spiritual experiences, how then can he say he is not willing to boast about himself? The Apostle is not actually being contradictory but setting up a contrast to emphasize what he is willing to boast about and what he is not.

We again see Paul's deep irony as he uses the third-person pronoun that allows him to distance himself from the visionary man when it is clearly him. By this means, however, he sets himself apart from his opponents who seem to readily take bragging rights for their spiritual experiences. Thus, Paul admits to the worthiness of boasting about such a person but refuses to take the limelight directly. There is good reason: the only proper boast about himself, he insists, is in his nonspectacular weaknesses and their results that he feels continually.

In sum, his objective does not permit him to use his heavenly ascent as the focal point of his boasting, but it does allow him to use the experience to introduce the singular weakness of his life: the "thorn in the flesh."

In 12:6, we see that his boasting about his weaknesses also served another purpose: so that "no one will consider me more than what he sees me to be or hears from me." He admits, however, that if he did

choose to boast, it would not make him a fool. And why? Because, as he says, “I will speak the truth.” Some members, given the conditions in Corinth with which they concurred, would have expected and likely appreciated if the Apostle did boast about his strengths and accomplishments. He would have been on solid ground to do so, and he admits the point because, as he states, he could do it in truth. His wording is interesting because it implies that others had boasted and been found to have misrepresented the truth. Given the weight of the honor-shame mentality of Corinthian society, to be caught either in a lie or a gross exaggeration would bring shame upon the individual and prove to be an act of utter foolishness.

Paul’s truthfulness shielded him from such a tarnishing situation. Thus, his revelatory involvements, even though only briefly mentioned, topped anything his critics could claim.

Though the Apostle had not and would not become conceited or proud because of the remarkable spiritual experiences he had had, he still feels the need to deflect any unintended acclaim and, therefore, now explains to the Saints God’s help in keeping him humble. In 12:7 he admits that “the extraordinary nature of the revelations” he had received could have opened the door to his becoming “overly proud.” To guard against this, in deep humility, he admits that God gave him “a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan” that continues to torment him.

Just what he references is unclear. One of the problems is that the word Paul uses to describe his ailment, *σκόλοψ* (*skolops*), can refer to a stake, a splinter, or a thorn. Some like the image of a stake because of the acute pain such an object would produce when being driven into the human body. However, based on the words used in the Septuagint, “thorn” is the better translation. Even so, the idea of something incessantly painful or vexing dominates the imagery. His language describing the problem as a messenger from Satan suggests its cruel and punishing nature. The visualization exposes the trouble as more than a mere annoyance. Rather, it is a chronic burden but one that falls short of a major incapacitating illness or obstructive condition that could stop the work. Even so, its torment is frequent if not constant.

In 12:9, the Apostle reports that God did eventually respond to his heartfelt pleadings. His words did not promise relief but rather gave understanding. “My grace is sufficient for you,” the Lord assured him, “for my power is made complete in weakness.” The answer appears to have come through oracular means and thereby was related clearly and forcefully. The answer was not what Paul wanted, but it was what he needed. The perfect tense in which he chose to cast the words, “He said” (*εἶρηκεν, eirēken*), underscores that the answer reverberated within him continually.

The godly response gave him two insights. The first explained how Paul would be able to manage the stress of the thorn. God would enable him to deal with it. Divine grace would be sufficient (*arkeō*). As unlikely as it seemed, the thorn would be the means by which Paul would continually receive God’s grace. Through that grace, as he came to understand it, the malady would not keep him from successfully serving the Lord but would actually help him do it. The reason? The condition yielded power and comfort. And once the answer came, Paul fought neither against the godly decision and the reception of divine grace it disclosed nor its understood obligatory requirements.

Paul puts his point over in 12:10 by tacitly asking his adversaries as well as his champions that if he is as weak as he is made out to be—and readily admits to—how can he have both endured the heavy trials he has been through and have the successes he has had? Many would likely admit that these two things would take great strength. Thus, the answer that he forces out of these people is that his strength must come from somewhere outside of himself. If that is the case, then from what or whom? Paul supplies the answer: it comes from Christ Jesus.

The point is that through the Savior’s grace, weakness becomes a means to divine ends in one of two ways: first, by allowing the weakness to continue but, with the Savior’s help, act as a refining force or, second, by replacing or changing the weakness, through the Lord’s transforming enablement, into a strength.

In 12:10, Paul brings this pericope to a close with a sharp rebuke against his detractors. He is able to do so with a statement of paradox: “When I am weak, I am strong.” And how is that? Because, as Paul clearly declares, weaknesses provide God with an opportunity to manifest His strength in the success of the humble person’s life (10:17).

12:11–12

At this point, Paul concludes his “fool’s speech” begun in 2 Corinthians 11:1. He does so with an acknowledgement of what he has done—that is, lowering himself by playing the fool. But he goes on to explain the reason why: he was forced to do it. This is because he was caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, only by boasting would he get the attention and accreditation he needed. On the other, by boasting he engaged in a practice he detested. Thus, it was for him a necessary evil forced upon him by the exigencies of the condition rampant among the Saints in Corinth.

Paul lays the blame squarely on the shoulders of the Corinthians Saints themselves, for they had every reason to commend him but did not. As he has made clear, their commendation of him, however, was not and is not the basis of his apostleship; God is.¹⁷ Even so, these people themselves evidenced the seal of his apostleship and remain the validation of his work (1 Corinthians 9:2; 2 Corinthians 3:2–3). Therefore, their commendation means much to him. And this, he insists, they should have given because they owed it to him on the basis of his being the one who united them with Christ (1 Corinthians 4:15; 2 Corinthians 11:2).

He quickly adds a humble disclaimer to emphasize his point: he is, in reality, nothing (*οὐδείς, oudeis*). The term refers to a person who is of little consequence or significance. Paul makes no claim to personal adequacy. The only way he can boast, therefore, is in the Lord (2 Corinthians 10:17–18). He clarifies this position in the next verse when he shows himself, under God, to be everything and thus, in reality, superior to all. Here he is using the force of understatement to help make his point. Through this oblique disclaimer, he posits that he is actually everything to these people so far as their salvation is concerned.

It is to support this point that Paul makes his statement in 12:12. He appeals to the signs (*σημεία, semeia*), or the divine outward manifestation that evidenced his authority, that God made manifest among

the Corinthian Saints during the time that the Apostle sojourned among them. Paul states these marvels were produced through the exercise of extreme patience (*pasē hypomonce*), the phrase likely referring to the effort required of the Apostle in dealing with these people.

12:13

In 12:13, Paul ends this portion of his treatise. He does so by addressing the major problem that stuck in the craw of some of the Corinthian Saints. The problem stemmed from the practice of patronage and its associated social reciprocity that permeated every level of society in Paul's day. As a result, it influenced how the people interpreted the Apostle's actions. Christian practice allowed missionaries to accept financial aid while preaching the gospel. As the Corinthians saw it, rather than accept the help they willingly offered (and the obligation it entailed), Paul stooped to menial labor. As a result, these converts felt that his act was akin to a socially demeaning slap in the face. What added to their gall was that he gladly received financial help from the Macedonian Saints (Philippians 4:15–17).

To forcefully get his audience to understand that his former actions should in no way be interpreted as a disgrace that fell upon them, he continues to put his barbed pen to good use. He does so with a question and then a demand. He designed his question to force them to see that in matters that really counted (namely, the reception and participation in wondrous spiritual manifestations), they had not missed out on a single blessing. In sum, they were not one whit behind other churches and, as a result, should feel good about themselves.

The only rub, then, had to be Paul's unwillingness to burden them with meeting his needs. The silliness of their position Paul discloses with his less than sincere demand: "Please forgive me this injustice!" His point is that they were in no way mistreated.

12:14

With his statement that "I will not be a burden to you," Paul makes very clear an important aspect of his visit: he fully plans to take care of his own upkeep (2 Corinthians 12:14). In so saying, he tacitly affirms that in spite of the pressure he has received to reverse his stand, he has not budged a bit from his former position. The implication is that all had better be ready to accept that fact. With the next two phrases, he gives two reasons for his position and in doing so again undercuts the activities, teachings, and hopefully, the influence of his enemies. In the first, he notes his objective: though he is not in the least interested in their possessions, he is highly interested in something of far greater value—they. Considering that some insinuated that Paul planned to use part of the funds gathered for the poor in the Holy Land for himself, his statement put a damper on their position. With the second phrase, he explains why he has taken the position that he has. It is the responsibility of parents, he insists, to take care of their children, not the other way around. Since he was the one who, like a parent, brought the Corinthians into a new life in the gospel, he must keep up the duty of a loving parent.

12:15

We see that Paul's tender heart drives him to be tough on the Saints in 2 Corinthians 12:15, where his quill, though no less strident, becomes less barbed. This allows for the personal disappointment and hurt that these people have caused him to come clearly through. Even so, their uncalled-for actions have not quelled his love for them.¹⁸ As a result, he can declare his continued willingness to not only spend (*δαπανάω*, *daranaō*) his means but also to overspend (*ἐκδαπανάω*, *ekdaranaō*) his life to work for the salvation of their souls. The force of the verbs he uses emphasizes his willingness to expend great effort in their behalf. But the verb "to spend" carries another nuance that is also at play here—that of paying out various assets in order to obtain benefits.

In an attempt to push them to see the purity of his motive, he assures the Saints that his willingness to do menial labor, though demanding, time consuming, and perhaps even distasteful to some, actually demonstrates his very deep love for them. Thus, they should interpret his actions that way. Given that, he asks why his hard yet loving labor has caused him to be loved less by some. In no way was he attempting to demean them or spurn their offering. Thus, he points out, any withdrawal of their love and respect for him was and is uncalled for.

12:16–18

In 2 Corinthians 12:16–18, the Apostle clarifies his mission. To do so, in the second half of 12:16, he changes tactic. His focus is now not on those hurt or upset because of his seeming rejection of them through his scrupulous independence. Even his most vociferous enemies had to admit he received no local help. It may well be that some of the Saints, given Paul's defense, began to question why the interlopers demanded pay or why they demanded so much pay (insinuated in 11:20).

Thus, the Apostle addresses charges brought against him that he has taken advantage of the local Saints through a cunning artifice. And what was that? He supplies the answer in 12:17–18. The text suggests that at one time, the interlopers had their greedy eye on the growing collection of funds that Paul had initiated for the Jerusalem poor. Since, however, it was designated strictly for helping these people, the interlopers had no way of accessing it. It was but an easy step for them to project their greed onto Paul. In short, he was guilty of positioning his delegates such that they could take advantage of the kindness and generosity of the Saints to his financial benefit. The final clause in 12:16, dripping with irony, is Paul's blunt insistence that he has acted in all matters with complete integrity.

In 12:17, the Apostle presses the Saints to come up with concrete instances when he or his delegates have acted with deviousness. In 8:16–24, he noted that he specifically tasked his delegates to make sure that the collection for the Jerusalem poor was administered properly. He now asks anyone in his audience, having examined carefully what has been and is taking place through his representatives, to step forward if they have detected any malfeasance. His tacit point is that some of his detractors have been hiding behind

generalizations that cannot be proved or disproved. He now demands that on the basis of specifics, his accusers either prove their accusations or drop the case.

To push his innocence, in 12:18, he reiterates his interaction with Titus. This well recognized and respected Christian minister had made frequent trips to Corinth as the Apostle's envoy and thereby became well known to the people. Paul makes it clear that he was responsible for initiating Titus's visit to the city (8:16–17), but he also makes it clear that he was the one who sent another brother along with him. The point of the latter seems to be that the addition of another guarded against collusion. Thus, Paul can ask his audience if they have found any misappropriation of the funds by his delegates. Ingeniously, he phrases the question such that the answer demands the admission that his delegates, and therefore he himself, have acted with complete integrity. In this way he successfully rebuts the false accusations against him.

12:19

In 2 Corinthians 12:19, the Apostle clarifies the purpose of his writing. He explains to his audience that his ministry is being carried out before God but in relationship with Christ. In that regard, it has but one purpose: the edifying of the Saints. The purpose of his focus is to get those in need of repentance to do so before he arrives and to do so quickly. That his visit lasted only a couple of months suggests some success (Acts 20:2–3).

With his reference to his audience as “my beloved brothers and sisters” we see a definite softening of tone. Noteworthy is that the first verse in this new portion acts as an interim conclusion not only for the section but also for the entire epistle. The Apostle has not and is not writing strictly in self-defense as would a contemporary apologist, but as he insists, he is writing before God and for the purpose of edifying the Saints.

12:20–21

In 2 Corinthians 12:20–21, Paul expresses his fears. The first is that he and these Saints will be quite disappointed in one another. The second is that the gravity of certain sins among these people has not been properly addressed. On this latter matter, Paul stresses his position is not defensive but rather offensive, for he will hold accountable all those who have either committed or supported division or immorality. This is an important transition moment in the letter, for here the Apostle turns the tables on his audience by stressing that his letter is not about them testing him to see if Christ speaks in him but rather is a test to see if Christ lives in them. The center of the test rests here because they can proclaim themselves Christians only if he is what he says he is because he founded the gospel among and *in* them.

The list in verse 20 is composed of items that reveal a divided Church. The vices Paul names are a natural and shameful outgrowth of the effects of factions competing one with another. The center of concern that the list reveals is that the Church is in turmoil. Indeed, the depth of hostility that possibly exists among these people, if left unchecked, could destroy the local Church. For that very important reason, there must be a remedial aspect to the Apostle's visit.

The list in verse 21 is composed of items that reveal the conditions of individuals beset by immorality. These vices taken together reflect the condition of those who never left their pagan ways and who continue in the dissolutions of that lifestyle (6:1). The center of concern here is less with the destruction of the Church and more with the destruction of the individual soul.

Together, the lists indicate that both parties, unfortunately, remain untouched by the gospel of reconciliation Paul continually promotes (5:20; 6:14). It may be that the Apostle is expressing his stand that whether the people are guilty of communal strife, immorality, or both, all the unrepentant will most definitely feel the full brunt of his wrath. However, it is possible that Paul is actually separating the two in order to isolate and thereby more powerfully drive home his warning to each—that they will come under censure to the degree their actions and recalcitrance demand.

Paul fears that should he arrive and find that many of these people have continued to be embroiled in strife and immorality, he will suffer deep shame from God. How so? Paul's divinely assigned task was twofold. The first was to bring these people as a pure bride to Christ (11:2). The second was to build them up through teaching and example (12:19). Failure to do these would result in deep shame from the God who entrusted him with the task.

These people simply refuse to heed Paul's teachings to "be reconciled to God" and live as Christians should (5:20; 6:14–7:1). Thus, they have forced him into a position in which he must act.

Paul is, however, not a bit thrilled about that, and as he says in 12:21, he will grieve over them. His words reveal that he remains pastorally and emotionally invested in these people and that his desire to build them up, to edify them, remains his primary motivation. That the verb in the phrase "my God will humble me" (*ταπεινώσει, tapeinōsē*) is in the subjunctive mood is telling. It suggests that Paul holds out a strong hope that God will not have to humble him because these people will heed the Apostle's warning and will take proper action. Even so, it is clear that Paul blames the possible Corinthian failure and his cause for deep grief not on primarily on his detractors but on the Saints themselves. Thus, the repentance he demands has very wide application.

2 Corinthians 13

13:1

Second Corinthians 13 begins with Paul's note that this will be his third visit to these people. The tone carries a suggestion of exasperation that such is necessary. Like other branches, they should have been well on their way to self-governance in the discipline of the gospel. They are not. By referring to Deuteronomy 19:15, Paul informs them that if he arrives and finds them yet unrepentant, he will not be sorrowful like he was when he wrote his earlier harsh letter. This time he will meet unrepentant sins with unmitigated severity. There is no doubt that he plans to hold a formal inquiry conforming to the strictest requirements of ecclesiastical procedure. He will spare none from his scrutiny (13:2).

Noteworthy is Paul's change of pronouns from the third-person plural *we* to the first-person singular pronoun *I*. No longer are his references to his work in association with his fellow missionaries. He now focuses specifically on what he personally intends to do and in doing so brings his apostolic authority center stage. Of course, he has no authority or power other than his word, but that word is not of human origin but is from the Lord.

13:2–3

Paul informs his audience that he delayed his visit thus far in the hope that such an action will not be necessary (compare 2 Corinthians 1:23). He then explains why he will take strict action if he does find it necessary: some have challenged his apostolic authority, demanding that he show some sign that Christ speaks through him (13:3). Using his sense of irony, he assures them that his proof will be opposite to what they likely expect: stern judgment rather than obsequious allowance. His detractors may have based their position on Paul's actions when he visited them the second time. He apparently had used "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" but to no avail (10:1). As a result, conditions forced him to withdraw for a time to let matters settle.

Paul then sent the Corinthians the "severe letter" (1:23; 2:1), an ultimatum as it were, in an attempt to restore his position. This act seems to have worked among a large segment of the Saints, as Titus reported (7:7, 9–11, 13–16). The likely reason it did was that such an action fit better with the culture in which the Church sat. These people were accustomed to more callous modes of treatment, especially when being disciplined not only by both Roman magistrates and local officials but also by members of the upper crust. That such unkind behavior should not be the case within the Christian community does not seem to have registered with some. Hence, some felt no compunction in yielding to the interlopers' mistreatment of them (11:20).

The force of 13:3 reveals Paul's desire that his strong language will have the same effect his severe letter did in bringing repentance and humility, but on a larger group. Hence, his focus changes from a fear he will be forced to use severe discipline to a much more optimistic hope that the Corinthians will see that the outward appearance of a lack of power is actually a sign only of apparent, not real, weakness and that this is true of Paul as well. Godly power, he insists, will allow all to live with the Lord. Its result would be further reconciliation, allowing the Apostle to fulfill his God-given mission to build up the kingdom rather than tear down these people. That this is possible, Paul's language reveals, is because the power of Christ is yet active among them.

13:4

In 2 Corinthians 13:4, the Apostle draws a parallel. Christ was crucified because of weakness. Admittedly, He assumed that weakness, for He always had access to divine power, but He became weak so that God's will could be accomplished through Him. This point is important because the "weakness" of the Lord is often taken to refer exclusively to His human frailty and apparent defenselessness before both Jewish and Roman

authorities. Rather, the phrase seems more pointed toward the Savior's *posture* of nonretaliation due to His willingness to follow His determined obedience even into a most torturous of deaths (Philippians 2:5–11).

In much the same way, Paul and his associates are “weak in him,” or in the imposition they have placed on themselves to properly carry out His work. By virtue of their relationship with the Savior they must be weak in the same way He was. Paul especially refuses to dominate by imposing on their faith and generosity.

Paul's point, however, is that the Savior's display of weakness did not stop God from giving the Son eternal life. In the same way, weakness will not stop the Father from working in and through the Apostle and his fellow missionaries. Indeed, Paul will display that very power toward these Saints as he uses his authority to purge the Church, if necessary, of the unrepentant and defiant.

13:5–6

At this point (2 Corinthians 13:5), Paul turns the tables on his audience. Where some demanded he prove that Christ speaks in him, he now demands—twice!—that the congregation examine themselves (*πειράζω*, *peirazō*). The object of that self-examination is to see if they are “in the faith.” The articular noun shows that in this context, faith is not a mere human response to or disposition of belief. Here the Apostle aligns with the Book of Mormon wherein faith is a response to what one hears and is a willingness to act by making and keeping covenants. Through that action, confirmation comes and faith is rewarded (Alma 32:26–43). In the present context, however, Paul looks at the content of faith, or in other words, the system of belief held by (or that should be held by) the Christian community at large.

To push his point, Paul asks a rhetorical question requiring a positive answer: “Or don't you realize (*ἐπιγινώσκω*, *epiginōskō*) that the Spirit of Christ is in you?” In no way could the members of his audience deny the reality of the living Spirit that had and continues to operate both among and in them. But to push his point, Paul includes an ironic barb: “Unless, of course, you fail the test.” Such could happen only if they could not detect any action of the Spirit in their lives. Even though they lived in a less than ideal harmonious condition, through the grace of God they still enjoyed the amazing and palpable impact of the Spirit personally. Indeed, it continually manifested itself in both public and private ways. To deny that such is not the case is, for them, unthinkable. That being a fact, there is only one conclusion they can draw as Paul notes in 13:6: the Apostle himself must also possess that same Spirit. And why? Because it was he who initially brought the gospel with its attendant spiritual gifts to the Corinthians. Thus, the positive result of the Corinthian's self-examination is proof of God's endorsement of Paul and his companions. As he notes in 13:6, Paul fully anticipates that such will be proved fully true during his upcoming visit.

13:7

Though the Apostle's expressed view of some of these people has been rather harsh, we see that Paul is motivated by his love for them. He can be patient with them because of his perspective on how evil works. From his point of view, evil rules in the unrejuvenated human soul and causes a person to do wrong even when it is

not his or her deliberate intent (Romans 7:15–21; compare 2 Nephi 4:16–35). It expresses itself in malevolent acts, with the result that the sinner is not only separated from God but also comes under His severe judgment.

In this light, it is easy to see why in 13:7 Paul opens his heart to the Saints, noting his sincere prayer in their behalf and why he makes it. His prayer “that you will do what is right” is balanced with his prayer that “you will do nothing wrong.” Together they suggest that the rightness he hopes for is that they will accept his demands to see that they expunge the evil from among them before he arrives. He also assures them that there is nothing self-centered in his motive. He has no desire to prove that he and his companions have passed the test of authenticity at the expense of his audience even if it appears that the missionaries fail the test.

13:8

Because the driving force behind all Paul does is building these people up, in 2 Corinthians 13:8 he can proclaim that his whole motivation rests upon one thing: the truth. His words reveal his understanding that truth is found exclusively in the gospel of Christ Jesus. In it, when properly viewed, the Saint can see the saving response of the Father to human blindness, a blindness often caused by deception, either human or demonic (4:3–4; 11:3, 12–15).

For this reason, all that Paul does is in support of the gospel. So strong is his conviction of the truth that he cannot fight against it. Even so, in the present context, the truth seems to point in but one direction: Paul’s Christ-given authority and his ability to use it. Thus, this sentence, though mild, stands as the Apostle’s warning that he will not forsake his use of power if he finds it necessary.

13:9

However, as Paul notes in 2 Corinthians 13:9, it is not his use of power that will cause both him and his companions to rejoice. On the contrary, it is that they might appear to some to be weak. The reason this causes him such delight is that it means he will not have to negatively display his apostolic power. This is because these people have gotten rid of the evil among them either through repentance or expungement as he asked. His words stress that it is his concern for their spiritual welfare that outweighs by far any anxiety he might have over his personal reputation. The degree to which this is true he highlights as he shares with them another item for which he prays: their spiritual strength (*κατάρτισις, katartisis*).

13:10

In 2 Corinthians 13:10, Paul states clearly the reason why he has spoken so harshly to these people (in chapters 10–13). Specifically, it is to let them know that his goal is to promote both repenting and spiritual strengthening. But behind his goal, he is offering them a chance to restore their relationship with him. If that happens, then his epistolary efforts will have been as effective as he desires, for he will not have to exercise the degree of harshness his letter both carries and threatens. Instead, he will be able to use his

apostolic powers for the primary reason Christ gave them to him: to edify, build up, and strengthen the branches of the Church, not to tear down the people.

13:11

The Apostle, having expressed clearly in the previous section of his epistle his intent and purpose in writing, now brings the whole to a close (2 Corinthians 13:11). He does so, as he has done in other letters, by admonishing his audience to carry on in a certain way with a promise of what will happen if they do (1 Thessalonians 5:14–23; Philippians 4:4–7).

He heads his list with the admonition to rejoice (*χαίρω, chairō*). Though his ministry has been plagued by suffering, rejection, and both mental and physical hardships, he has nonetheless experienced the joy that comes through the strength and grace that the gospel of Christ gives.¹⁹ He wants the Saints, who have and still do suffer, to feel the same.

Second, he admonishes them to mend their ways (*καταρτίζω, katartizō*). They desperately need to repair the damage that has been done in their relationship with God, Christ, Paul, and one another and to restore the order demanded by a Christian community. Only in this way can they heal the breaches between them and recover their spiritual, theological, and practical bearings and find that unity in Christ that the Savior demands of His people.

Third, Paul admonishes them to be comforted or encouraged (*παρακαλέω, parakaleō*). The reference is to what he has taught and admonished them through the course of this letter. His words suggest that he feels that they are fully capable of meeting the conditions he has set down and can, therefore, be heartened rather than discouraged by what he has said. Though he has been forced to use harsh words to get these people to move against the unrighteous among them, the overall effect that Paul wants his letter to have is of comfort. Reading just chapters 10–13 most certainly would have left some, if not most, of his readers in distress, but taking the epistle as a whole, as Paul wishes, the Saints should realize that God is yet with them and that it is the Apostle's intent to let them know that because of this, all can be regained.

Fourth, Paul admonishes them agree with one another (*φρονέω, phroneō*). The focus of his comment does not rule out individual opinion in matters of little consequence to the faith, but rather he wants them to be agreed on matters concerning faith and their expression of it. Paul's letter clearly shows areas of division where none should have been. Examples include definitions of what constitutes spirituality (10:2–7), the nature of apostolic authority (11:1–12:14), the degree to which God's old covenant is overtaken by the new (3:3–18), and the impropriety of continuing in a Gentile lifestyle (6:16–7:1). In these matters there should have been no division, for as his letter has pointed out, the correct position on all such matters is clear and nonnegotiable.

Fifth, Paul admonishes the Saints to live in peace (*ειρήνη, eirēnē*). This admonition is closely related to and grows out of the one above. Doctrinal and policy disputes have ravaged the unity of the branches (12:20–13:2), but if the members will just find unity in what they believe and their expressions of faith, they will also find accord in their dealings with one another.

On the basis of following these admonitions, the Apostle can assure the people that “the God of love and peace” will be with them. The implication is that, if they will but yield to Paul’s demands, God will bestow upon them these heavenly attributes, and thus they will enjoy peace and warm association both with him and one another.

13:12

In 2 Corinthians 13:12, Paul closes his letter using the valedictory formula followed both within the Christian and larger Greco-Roman communities, but he does so with some variance. The command to greet others is common and denotes the extension of a warm welcome and recognition. Paul, however, explains just how such a greeting was to be given: with a holy kiss. There is little known about this greeting ritual, which is a bit surprising since it seems to have been a central practice among various branches of the Church and was endorsed by Paul (1 Corinthians 16:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:26). Though it is not certain, it is likely that such a kiss was not mouth to mouth but mouth to cheek. The gesture was a show of respect and honor and often used by disciples to honor their teachers and was designed, ideally, to quell contention and bring unity among the members. Further, in a society rife with potentially harsh social hierarchies of the patron-client relationship, this Christian act of love, properly motivated, could transcend these social boundaries and work toward establishing a family of equals.

13:14

The Apostle closes with a heartfelt prayer that, though brief, is theologically profound and imposing. It reflects the experience that being a Saint allows on both the individual and collective levels. It is on these levels that the grace of Christ acts to lift, purify, and enable. By comprehending this grace, the love of God is enjoyed (Romans 5:5; 8:9). Being the God of love, He is also the one who loves His children and provides mercy, comfort, and resurrected life (1:3; 9–11; compare 9:7). By further comprehending this grace, companionship of the Holy Ghost with all its powers, gifts, and blessings becomes reality.

Noteworthy is that the benediction shows Paul’s understanding of the Godhead as composing three distinct individuals. There is the “God of love and peace,” who is also the Father of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ from whom mercy flows. Finally, there is the Holy Spirit with whom fellowship can be achieved, thus showing that such is neither a force nor an influence but an actual personage.

Notes

- 1 Isaiah 1:10–15; 43:24–28; Amos 5:25–27; compare Doctrine and Covenants 64:34.
- 2 2 Corinthians 3:7–11, 19; 4:6, 15.
- 3 Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, *Making Sense of the New Testament: Timely Insights and Timeless Messages* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2010), 374).

- 4 See Alma 12:26; 13:12; 16; Moroni 7:3.
- 5 Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 492).
- 6 Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 494.
- 7 Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 506; Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 488.
- 8 For a more in-depth look at Paul and boasting versus self-praise, please see Richard D. Draper and Michael D. Rhodes, “Excurses on Self-Praise and Boasting,” in *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, forthcoming), 202.
- 9 See Isaiah 9:6; 37:32; 63:15–16 in the Septuagint.
- 10 1 Corinthians 9:12; 2 Corinthians 6:3; compare 2 Corinthians 2:17; 1 Thessalonians 2:5.
- 11 Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 537.
- 12 Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 550.
- 13 George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians* (Ada, MI: Baker, 2015), 566.
- 14 See Nehemiah 9:6; 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chronicles 2:6; 6:16; Psalm 148:4.
- 15 “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p. 1556, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/199>; capitalization and punctuation silently modernized.
- 16 Alma 40:12; 2 Nephi 9:13; Doctrine and Covenants 76:50–70; 137:7–9; 138:31–34.
- 17 1 Corinthians 4:3; 2 Corinthians 5:12–16; Galatians 1:1.
- 18 See 2 Corinthians 2:4; 8:7; 11:11.
- 19 2 Corinthians 1:24; 2:3; 6:10; 7:4, 13.

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