

Information on Paul: (Taken from *An Introduction to the New Testament*.)

- Who is the author? (2 Cor. 1:1-2)
- What do we know about him from the Bible? (See: Acts 7:54-60; Acts 8:1-3; Acts 9; Acts 16:16-40; and many others.)
- What else can we know about him? (See info. below.)
- When did he write 2 Cor.?

2 Corinthians 1:1-2

New International Version (NIV, 2011)

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all his holy people throughout Achaia:

2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

DATE

Quite apart from constraints imposed on the dating of these epistles by the need to fit Paul's movements and writings together, there is one fixed point. There is an inscription recording a rescript of the Emperor Claudius to the people of Delphi that mentions Gallio as holding the office of proconsul in Achaia during the period of Claudius's twenty-sixth acclamation as imperator⁸⁷—a period known from other inscriptions⁸⁸ to cover the first seven months of A.D. 52.⁸⁹ Proconsuls

normally began their tour of duty on July 1, which means that Gallio probably ascended to the proconsulship on July 1, 51. However, it is possible that the rescript belongs to the very end of the seven-month period, in which case Gallio may have taken up his duties on July 1, 52. The latter date leaves only one month for the rescript, so the former date is perhaps marginally more likely.⁹⁰

If the Jews made their united attack on Paul (Acts 18:12) fairly early during Gallio's proconsulship, then probably it was in the autumn of A.D. 51. After the case was dismissed, Paul stayed in Corinth for some time (Acts 18:18) and then sailed for Syria, probably in the spring of 52. Paul's two-and-a-half-year stint in Ephesus would have taken him to the autumn of 55. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians while he was in Ephesus, some time before Pentecost (16:8), probably during his last year—that is, early in 55, with 2 Corinthians being complete within the next year or so. By that time he was in Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:12–13; 7:5; 8:1–5; 9:2). Primarily because of the uncertainty over the beginning date of Gallio's proconsulship, all of these dates could be advanced by one year.

PAUL'S BACKGROUND

Who was this man Paul? Exploring his background will help us to understand him better and to interpret his words more accurately. Paul himself provides a rough outline of his background, but this material is scattered throughout his epistles. The basic historical details are conveniently grouped in the speeches Paul gave (as reported by Luke) to a hostile crowd of Jews on the steps of the temple (Acts 22:1–21) and to King Agrippa II and the Roman procurator Festus (Acts 26:2–23). (On the historical value of each material in Acts, see below on the chronology of Paul's missionary career, and chap. 7 above.)

"Born in Tarsus of Cilicia" (Acts 22:3)

Tarsus was the major city in Cilicia, a region in the extreme southeastern part of Asia Minor.² In Paul's day the city was the capital of the Roman province Syria-Cilicia (see Gal. 1:21). It was prosperous, privileged (it was exempt from Roman taxation), and cultured, being famous for its schools.³ Not only was Paul born in Tarsus, but he was also a citizen of this "no ordinary city" (Acts 21:39).

More important, however, was the fact that Paul was a citizen of Rome. The Romans did not confer citizenship on just anyone; only a small percentage of people who lived within the Roman Empire possessed this privilege. Paul's Roman citizenship was inherited from his family (Paul claims, "I was born a citizen" [Acts 22:28]), perhaps because of some deed of service performed by his father or grandfather for the Romans.⁴ However achieved, Paul's Roman citizenship was an important and providential qualification for his role as missionary to the Roman Empire. It enabled him to escape detainment when his preaching brought disfavor (Acts 16:37–39), to avoid punishment (Acts 22:23–29), and to plead his case before the emperor's court in Rome (Acts 25:10–12).

As a Roman citizen, Paul had three names: a first name (*praenomen*), family name (*nomen*), and surname (*cognomen*). Of these, we know only his cognomen, Παῦλος (*Paulos*). Paul's native town may also have led him into his trade. A local product, *cilicium*, was used to make tents, and Luke tells us that Paul was himself a "tentmaker" (Acts 18:3).⁵ This is presumably the trade that Paul pursued during his missionary work in order not to burden the churches with his support (e.g., 1 Thess. 2:9).

"Brought up in this city" (Acts 22:3)

This phrase in Paul's speech on the temple steps has given rise to a debate about whether Paul's early years were spent in Tarsus or Jerusalem. The issue has attracted so much attention because it figures in the debate about Paul's thought world: was he indebted more to the Greek world or to the Jewish world

for his teaching? The contribution of this phrase to the debate depends on two issues. First, does "this city" refer to the city in which Paul is speaking (Jerusalem) or to the city he has just mentioned (Tarsus)? Nigel Turner has argued for the latter,⁶ but the former is more likely, considering the setting of the speech. The second issue is the punctuation of the verse, the two possibilities being clearly represented in the TNIV and NRSV:

TNIV: I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. . . .

NRSV: I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law. . . .

The TNIV, by putting a period after "this city," separates "brought up" from "under Gamaliel," and this suggests that "brought up" refers to Paul's parental nurturing as a young child. Paul would then be implying that, although born in Tarsus, he was raised in Jerusalem.⁷ The NRSV rendering, on the other hand, by linking "brought up" with "at the feet of Gamaliel," requires that "brought up" refer to Paul's rabbinic education, a process that would have begun in his early teens. On this interpretation of the verse, Paul would perhaps be suggesting that he was brought up in Tarsus, moving to Jerusalem only when he went away to school.⁸

But the punctuation represented by the TNIV should probably be adopted. The three-stage sequence—born/brought up/educated—was a natural autobiographical pattern. Nevertheless, this does not solve the matter, nor is it the decisive point in the debate about Paul's background. On the one hand, Paul would have had ample opportunity to pick up Hellenistic ideas during his education in Jerusalem (Hellenism was by no means unknown in Jerusalem) or during his decade-long ministry in Tarsus after his conversion. On the other hand, even if Paul did spend the first ten or so years of his life in Tarsus, he need not have been imbued with Hellenistic ideas. Paul himself stresses that he was a "Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5), apparently meaning that both his parents and he himself were, linguistically and culturally, Jewish and Palestinian in their orientation (see 2 Cor. 11:22, and the contrast between Hebrew and Hellenist in Acts 6:1). The home in which he was raised, whether located in Tarsus or in

Jerusalem, was one in which Aramaic was spoken and traditional Palestinian Jewish customs were preserved.⁹ So to the extent that Paul's background influenced his theology, that influence was mainly Palestinian and Jewish. But having said this, we must also be careful not to erect rigid distinctions between "Hellenistic" and "Palestinian" or "Hellenistic" and "Jewish." There was a difference, as Paul's own claims imply. But the difference can be, and has at times, been exaggerated; Hellenistic ideas had penetrated Palestine and Judaism in the first century.¹⁰ "In antiquity ideas did not flow in pipes,"¹¹ and Paul's world was one in which he was exposed to many different influences and combinations of influences.

**"Thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors . . . zealous for God"
(Acts 22:3)**

Not only was Paul by birth a "Hebrew of Hebrews," but, as he never tired of emphasizing (see also Acts 26:5; Gal. 1:14; Phil. 3:5–6), he was by conviction a serious and zealous follower of Judaism, a member of its "strictest sect" (Acts 26:5), the Pharisees. Although scholars disagree considerably over many aspects of first-century Pharisaism, several things are relatively clear. The Pharisees paid a great deal of attention to the "oral law," "the traditions of the elders" (Mark 7:3 par.), a body of regulations designed to interpret and supplement the written, Mosaic law. They had a number of fundamental disagreements with the Sadducees, stemming from the Pharisees' greater willingness to accept doctrines not clearly stated in the Pentateuch (e.g., the resurrection of the body; see Acts 23:6–8). They exercised great influence over the common people, who respected their zeal for their beliefs and their desire to sanctify all aspects of life.¹² Paul was trained under Gamaliel I (see Acts 26:3), a Pharisee of the school of Hillel. Hillel and his followers were generally known for their liberality, an attitude revealed in Gamaliel's advice to the Sanhedrin about the early church (Acts 5:34–39). Paul seems to have differed from his teacher at this point. By his own repeated admission, Paul's zeal for Judaism led him to persecute the early Christian movement (e.g., Acts 22:4a; 26:9–11; Gal. 1:13; Phil. 3:6). But Paul may

not, after all, have differed much from his teacher. Gamaliel's advice as given before the Stephen incident revealed the extent to which at least some of the Christians were willing to do without the law and the temple. It may very well have been this development that turned Paul, and perhaps other Pharisees, against the fledgling Christian movement.¹⁴

"As I came near Damascus" (Acts 22:6)

The persecutor of Christians was turned into the foremost preacher of Christ by a sudden confrontation with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul's Damascus-road experience is described once by Luke (Acts 9:3–6), twice by Paul in Acts (22:6–11 and 26:12–15) and once by Paul in his epistles (Gal. 1:15–16). In addition to these clear descriptions, other allusions to this event are probably to be found in many places in Paul.¹⁵ Several scholars have suggested that the event and its implications played a basic role in the formation of much of Paul's theology.¹⁶ Paul's encounter with Christ was no merely psychological experience, nor was it even a divinely given vision. Paul's companions saw the blaze of light, although they did not see Jesus himself (see Acts 9:7 with 22:9), and heard, but did not understand, the voice (cf. Acts 9:7 with 22:9).¹⁶ Moreover, Paul makes clear that this appearance to him of the resurrected Jesus was fully on a par with the appearances to Peter and the others in the days between Jesus' resurrection and ascension (1 Cor. 15:5–8; see also 9:1).

The "revelation" (ἀποκάλυψις [apokalypsis]) of Christ to Paul came without any preparation. Paul gives no hint that before this point he was at all dissatisfied with his Jewish convictions or searching for a deeper experience of God. The texts that have sometimes been thought to indicate such a preparatory period are better interpreted otherwise. When Paul is warned by the heavenly voice that "it is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14), the meaning is not that Paul has been resisting the Spirit's wooing but that he should not

now resist the will of God expressed in the revelation from heaven.¹⁷ Neither does Romans 7:14–25 refer to a preconversion psychological struggle.¹⁸ Rather, the descriptions of the experience in Acts, as well as Paul's allusions to it in Philippians 3:3–11, suggest a sudden and dramatic turn from zealous Jew and persecutor of the church to a follower of Jesus.

The Damascus-road encounter turned Paul into more than a follower of Jesus: it turned him into a preacher of Jesus. Although the relationship between the two is not stated the same way in all the accounts, each one makes clear that Paul's conversion was also a call to ministry (Acts 9:15; 22:15; 26:15–18 and Gal. 1:16). Indeed, some have gone so far as to argue that this revelation was properly a "call" experience and not a "conversion" experience at all.¹⁹ But whatever the continuity between Judaism and Christianity, the New Testament makes clear that the two are distinct, that only within Christianity is salvation found. The change from one to the other is, then, appropriately called a conversion.²⁰ For Paul, however, conversion and call were bound up together. As Johannes Munck has emphasized, Paul viewed himself as a peculiar instrument in God's hands, one who, like the Old Testament prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, would have an important role to play in salvation history.²¹ It is significant in this light that, whereas ministry to Jews is certainly included in Paul's call (see Acts 9:15), Paul himself often emphasizes that his call was particularly a call to preach to Gentiles (Gal. 1:16; 1 Thessa. 2:4; Rom. 1:1, 5; 15:15–16). The mission of carrying the gospel to the Gentiles was fundamental to Paul's call and to his being chosen as a vessel for God's use.

The “Why” of 2 Corinthians:

- Why did Paul write this letter (See 2 Cor., information below)?
- What were his main points (See 2 Cor., information below)?
- How does this connect with his previous letter to the church at Corinth? (See 1 Corinthians)

2 Corinthians 1:1-2

New International Version (NIV, 2011)

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all his holy people throughout Achaia:

2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

From ESV Bible, Reference:

Paul's second letter to the Corinthians discusses some of the things previously addressed but also deals with new issues. While 1 Corinthians called for believers to be unified with each other, in this letter Paul urges the church to be unified with him in his ministry. Paul's opponents were undermining his work, claiming that his suffering (11:24-29) proved he was not a true apostle. Paul responds that his suffering highlights his dependence on Christ, as it points to Christ's strength rather than his own. Second Corinthians includes stirring perspectives on gospel ministry (chs. 2-5), encouragements to holy living (chs. 6-7), and instructions about giving (chs. 8-9).

2 CORINTHIANS

2 Corinthians falls into three sections: chapters 1 – 7 contain "Paul's explanation of his recent conduct and of the apostolic ministry in general; in chapters 8 – 9 Paul exhorts the Corinthians to complete their contribution to the collection for destitute believers in Jerusalem (cf. Rom. 15:25–26); chapters 10 – 13 are Paul's defence and vindication of his apostolic authority (see "Mission). Some scholars argue that the

canonical 2 Corinthians is a composite letter, comprising two or more separate letters, but a strong case can be made for its integrity and its being despatched as a simple composition, even if the actual writing of the document occurred over a period of time during which the situation at Corinth changed.

Chapters 1 – 7

The major theme of these chapters is 'comfort in the midst of affliction' (cf. 1:4).

Suffering

In this epistle there are two lengthy lists of Paul's apostolic 'sufferings' (viz. 6:4–10 and 11:23–29) but his theology of Christian suffering is most apparent in 1:3–11. He had recently experienced some unspecified affliction in the province of Asia that caused him to be so utterly and unbearably crushed that he was forced to renounce all hope of survival (1:8). But 'God had graciously intervened to deliver him and would do so again provided the Corinthians cooperated in "prayer" (1:10–11). Several principles emerge from Paul's discussion.

1. Suffering endured patiently deepens our appreciation of God's character, in particular his limitless compassion and never-failing 'comfort' (1:3–4; cf. Ps. 145:9; Is. 51:3, 12).

2. Suffering drives us to trust God alone. Paul's desperate plight had undermined his self-reliance and compelled him to depend totally on the God who raises the dead and who can therefore rescue the dying from the grip of 'death' (1:9).

3. Suffering leads to identification with 'Jesus Christ. Paul could identify his sufferings as 'the sufferings of Christ' (1:5) probably because they befell him as 'a person in Christ' (12:2) who was engaged in the service of Christ (4:11). They were Christ's sufferings because they contributed to the fulfilment of the suffering destined for the Body of Christ (Acts 14:22; Col. 1:24), or because Christ continued to identify himself with his afflicted 'church' (Acts 9:4–5).

4. The experience of God's comfort (his help, consolation and encouragement) in our suffering qualifies, equips and obliges us to comfort others undergoing any type of suffering (1:4, 6). The apostle's thought seems to imply four stages: Paul's own sufferings (which are Christ's sufferings; 1:4); his experience of God's comfort mediated

through Christ (1:5); the Corinthians' sufferings; their experience of God's comfort mediated through Paul (1:6–7).

5. Suffering is not for ever. In comparison with the weighty and eternal 'glory that is produced by suffering patiently endured, suffering is both light and momentary (4:17; cf. Rom. 8:17–18). Glory follows suffering (cf. Luke 24:26; 1 Pet. 1:11; 5:9–10).

Death and resurrection

Paul's disconcerting encounter with death (1:8–11), his incessant suffering (11:23–29; cf. 1 Cor. 15:31, 'Not a day but I am at death's door,' Moffatt), and his progressive physical debilitation (4:16) prompted him to reflect as never before on the nature of death for the Christian. Negatively, death means the destruction of the earthly tent-dwelling (5:1), the loss of both physical corporeality (we are no longer 'in the flesh') and earthly corporateness (we are no longer 'in Adam', although we remain 'in Christ', 1 Cor. 15:18; 1 Thess. 4:16). Positively, death brings departure from mortal embodiment to the presence of the Lord (5:8; cf. Phil. 1:23). A departure implies a destination as well as an evacuation, a 'to' as well as a 'from'. At death, believers are not left homeless but experience a change in their place of residence. Earthly embodiment means spatial distance or exile from the immediate presence of the Lord (5:6), since the Christian pilgrimage is in the realm of faith, not the realm of sight (5:7). But the same moment of death that marks the dismantling of the transitory tent of the physical body also marks the entrance into permanent residence 'with the Lord' (5:8) and therefore the enjoyment of active and mutual fellowship with him.

Although the terms 'raise' and 'resurrection' are not found in 5:1–10 (but see 4:14) it is clear, as Paul describes the sources of divine comfort that are afforded the believer who faces the possibility of death, that these include not only the assurance that death brings enriched communion with Christ (5:7–8) but also the certainty of the future possession of a 'spiritual body' (5:1; cf. 1 Cor. 15:44) and the knowledge that the indwelling Spirit (see 'Holy Spirit') is God's pledge of a resurrection transformation (5:4–5). This splendid hope (5:1–8), along with accountability to Christ (5:10), prompt the believer to seek the Master's constant approval (5:9).

Other important themes

1. *Church discipline* (2:5–11). Apparently Paul or one of his representatives at Corinth had been verbally insulted by someone in the Corinthian church. The precise nature of the offence is not known, but it clearly involved Paul since he offers his personal forgiveness (2:10). At first the congregation had not rallied to Paul's defence but, stung by his 'severe letter' which called for the punishment of the wrongdoer, the majority of them inflicted some unspecified penalty on the man. Now Paul calls for them to terminate the penalty and reaffirm their love for the man (2:8). For offences serious enough to warrant corporate church 'discipline (such as overt immorality not repented of [1 Cor. 5:1–11], false teaching actively propagated [Rom. 16:17], or divisiveness [Tit. 3:10]), there would seem to be five stages in the process, stages that are not only necessary but should also occur in a fixed order: 1. The wrongdoing (2:5), which implies an offending party (7:12) and sometimes an offended party (7:12). 2. The punishment (2:6), which is inflicted by 'the majority'. 3. The pain or sorrow (2:5, 7), which is suffered by the wrongdoer, and in a different sense, is felt by the whole congregation (2:5). 4. Repentance (implied in 2:6), which is the outcome of 'godly sorrow' (cf. 7:9–10). 5. Forgiveness (2:7, 10) and restoration (2:8), which are granted by the congregation as well as by the offended party.

2. *The two covenants* (3:7–18). The expression 'the old covenant' (3:14) may be a phrase coined by Paul; it follows naturally from Jeremiah's 'new covenant' (Jer. 31:31) and from the eucharistic tradition of the cup as 'the new covenant' ratified by Christ's blood (1 Cor. 11:25). The paragraph 3:7–11 is basically a comparison of the two 'covenants that establishes the surpassing glory of the new covenant. Both covenants are glorious (3:7–8), but the new is far more glorious than the old (3:9–11). The old was engraved on stone tablets (3:3, 7); the new is written on hearts-of-flesh tablets (3:3). One was a death-dealing written code; the other involves a life-giving Spirit (3:6). The era of the old covenant was a dispensation of death (3:7) and condemnation (3:9), a fading order (3:7, 11), whereas the era of the new covenant is a dispensation of the Spirit (3:8)

and of righteousness (3:9), a permanent order (3:11).

The second paragraph, 3:12–18, is an allusive homily based on Exodus 34:29–35, the account of 'Moses' regular encounters with Yahweh in the 'tent of meeting' before his speaking with the Israelites. In 3:18 Paul draws his conclusion regarding the superiority of the new covenant. Under this new economy, 1. not one man alone, but all believers see and then reflect the glory of the Lord; 2. unlike the Jews, who still read the law with veiled hearts, Christians, with unveiled faces, see the glory of Yahweh, which is Christ, in the mirror of the gospel; 3. glory is displayed inwardly in the character, not outwardly on the face; 4. so far from waxing and waning, the glory progressively increases until the believer acquires through resurrection a 'glorious body' comparable to Christ's (Phil. 3:21).

3. *Evangelism* (5:11–21). From one perspective evangelism is 'try(ing) to persuade people' (5:11, NIV) of the truth of the 'gospel. Paul's motivation for his evangelistic effort was, in part, 'the fear of the Lord' (5:11), that is, the sobering awareness of people's ultimate accountability to the Lord Christ (5:10). But other impulses for proclaiming the foolishness of the cross (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18) were the honour of God (5:13) and the love of Christ (5:14). Conversion involves gaining a new view of Christ – he is no messianic pretender, nor simply an exemplary moralist, but God's promised Messiah – and consequently a new view of other people (5:16), who are seen 'according to the Spirit' or in the light of the cross. The converted person also has a new relation to Christ, being 'in Christ' (5:17a), that is, in personal union with the risen Christ and incorporated within the body of Christ, the church. There has been a new act of divine creation (cf. 4:6) and a new set of relationships has been permanently established (5:17–18a). As for the content of the evangel, reconciliation to God has been achieved by the work of Christ (5:18b–19a) so that 'forgiveness of sins is granted (5:19b) and a right standing with God is acquired (5:21) by those who are reconciled to God (5:20b). The function of evangelists is three-fold. They are trustees of a message (5:19c), ambassadors for Christ, and advocates for God (5:20).

4. *Holiness of life* (6:14 – 7:1). Structur-

ally, this is a minor digression within Paul's major digression describing the apostolic ministry (2:14 - 7:4). He calls for the Corinthians to avoid getting into 'double harness' with unbelievers (6:14a; cf. Deut. 22:10; Lev. 19:19), that is, to sever all close attachments with non-Christians (such as membership of local pagan cults) that would compromise their professed loyalty to Christ or jeopardize the consistency of their Christian witness. This is not an injunction against all association with unbelievers (see 1 Cor. 5:9-10; 7:12-16; 10:27). However, Christianity and heathenism (especially idolatry) are incompatible, as Paul shows by five rhetorical questions (6:14b-16a). Such discerning separation from the world (6:17) leads to fellowship with God and his people (cf. Jas. 4:4). If Christians corporately are the temple of the living God (6:16; cf. 1 Cor. 3:16), individually they are the sons and daughters of a Father who is the Lord Almighty (6:18). The privilege of being a dwelling place of God (6:16) and the benefits of compliance with the divine will (6:17-18) Paul calls 'promises'; they motivate believers to avoid every source of possible defilement and so bring their 'holiness to completion by this proof of their reverence for God (7:1). Living for the honour of Christ (5:15) involves not only separation from outward evil (6:17) and from inward defilement (7:1) but also fellowship with the living God and with his family (6:16, 18).

Chapters 8 - 9

From AD 52-57 a large proportion of Paul's time and energies was devoted to arranging a collection among his Gentile churches for 'the poor among the saints in Jerusalem' (Rom. 15:26). He regarded this collection as an act of fraternal love (Gal. 6:10) that expressed the interdependence of the members of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:23-26), that symbolized the unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ (Eph. 2:11-22), and that dramatized for Gentile believers in material terms their spiritual indebtedness to the mother church in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:19, 27).

As Paul encourages the Corinthians to finalize their contribution to the collection, he appeals to a variety of motives which should prompt them to generous giving (8:1-15). There is the example of other believers (8:1-5, 8), their own promising start and desire for

spiritual excellence (8:6-7), and the supreme example of Christ himself who showed eagerness and generosity in giving as a demonstration of his love (8:8-9). Christ 'became poor' by the act of incarnation that followed his preincarnate renunciation of his 'wealth', the glory of heavenly existence (cf. Phil. 2:6-8). Paul then shows that Christian stewardship does not aim at the exchange of financial burdens so that the rich become poor and the poor rich, but rather at equal sharing of burdens that will lead to an equal supply of the necessities of life (8:13). Moreover, voluntary mutual sacrifice maintains that equality of supply (8:14), an equality which was enforced when God miraculously provided manna to the Israelites in the wilderness (8:15, citing Exod. 16:18).

Having spoken of the need for generosity (8:1-15), Paul proceeds to illustrate the twofold result of generosity (9:6-15). First, 'cheerful givers' who sow generously will also reap generously in God's provision of both spiritual grace and material prosperity ('all grace') that will permit them constantly to dispense spiritual and material benefits to others (9:6-11a). Second, because generous giving is evidence of God's grace (9:14; cf. 8:1-4), it prompts 'many expressions of thanks to God' (9:11b-13).

These two chapters highlight several characteristics of genuine Christian stewardship. It is voluntary, not enforced (8:3; 9:5, 7); generous, not parsimonious (8:2; 9:6, 13); enthusiastic, not grudging (8:4, 11-12; 9:7); deliberate, not haphazard (9:7); and sensible, not reckless (8:11-13).

Chapters 10 - 13

If the tone of chapters 1 - 7 is apologetic, and that of 8 - 9 hortatory, in 10 - 13 the tone is polemical, as Paul vigorously defends his authority as an apostle against the counter-claims of certain intruders from Palestine, who were 'false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ' (11:13). Here the chief theme is 'strength in the midst of weakness'. Divine power (10:3-5) finds its full scope and potency only in acknowledged human weakness (12:9; cf. 13:4).

Although Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus are commonly called 'the Pastorals', 2 Corinthians may justly be described as the pastoral epistle *par excellence*. Paul's theology of pastoral service may be discerned especially

in these last four chapters, as he exhibits the characteristics of a spiritual father (1 Cor. 4:14-15) who has been entrusted by God with the care of his children.

1. *Adaptability.* As Paul seeks to persuade his 'children' to open their hearts wide to him (6:13) and to close their hearts against his adversaries, he uses a delicate blend of meekness (10:1; 13:10) and boldness (10:2, 11; 11:13). Because the immature Corinthians were dazzled by the pompous boasting of the Judaizers about their credentials, Paul was forced to indulge in boasting as they did (10:8; 11:1, 16-18, 21-27; 12:1, 11), although he chose to boast in matters that showed his weakness (11:30), namely his humiliating nocturnal escape from Damascus (11:31-33) and his debilitating 'thorn in the flesh' (12:7). He uses biting irony (11:4, 19-21; 12:11, 13) that stops short of sarcasm. He shows sensitivity to the needs of the situation, in refusing to forgo his financial independence from his converts (11:7-12).

2. *Jealousy.* Paul was jealous for the Corinthians' undivided loyalty to Christ during the period between their betrothal to Christ (i.e. their conversion) and their presentation to him, their heavenly bridegroom (i.e. their glorification) (11:2-3). Paul pictures himself as the father of the bride, whose aim was to preserve her virginity, her 'sincere and pure devotion to Christ' (11:3), until her marriage. Whereas human jealousy is sinful, to share divine jealousy (11:2) is virtuous.

3. *Devotion.* Indicative of Paul's paternal devotion to his children was 'the daily pressure' of his anxious concern for all his churches (11:28), as he sympathized with their weakness in faith, conduct and conscience (11:29; cf. 1 Cor. 8:7-13; 9:22; 12:26). In this 'anxious concern' (*merimna*) Paul was not violating Jesus' teaching about anxiety (Matt. 6:25-34, where the verbal form of *merimna* occurs six times), since he was, in fact, seeking first the kingdom of God and grappling with present not future problems, and was free of anxiety about relatively trivial matters such as food and clothing (see 11:27).

4. *Affection.* Like parents who work hard and save up for their children (12:14), Paul was willing 'to spend and be spent' for the benefit of his spiritual children (12:15). Neither property nor energies would be spared in his endeavour to win their devotion

to Christ. When he asks, 'Am I to be loved the less because I love you the more [that is, so intensely]?' (12:15), he is seeking from his readers an appropriate response of filial love to his own paternal affection (cf. 6:11-13; 11:11).

5. *Fear.* As he contemplated his forthcoming third visit (12:14), Paul was fearful that it might lead to mutual embarrassment (12:20), that sin might continue to be rampant in the church (12:20), and that he might again be humiliated and grieved because of certain unrepentant Corinthians (12:21). These fears induced Paul to issue a warning of impending discipline (13:1-4) and a plea for self-examination (13:5-10). In each case he reverts to the theme of 'strength in weakness'. As a result of being 'in Christ', Paul shared the weakness of his Lord who was 'crucified in weakness' (13:4), the 'weakness' of non-retaliation and of obedience to God. But as a consequence of his fellowship 'with' Christ, Paul shared in the power of the risen Christ (13:4), which would be shown, if necessary, in his 'not sparing' any erring Corinthians (13:2-3). But if the Corinthians were 'strong' in Christ, giving evidence of robust and mature Christian character, Paul would be able to come to them in the 'weakness' of a 'gentle spirit' (1 Cor. 4:21, and then he would rejoice (13:9).

The letter ends with the famous trinitarian benediction (13:13) that is noteworthy for its unusual 'economic' order of Son-Father-Spirit that reflects Christian experience. It is through the grace exhibited by Christ (8:9) in his selfless devotion to others in life and death that God demonstrates his love (Rom. 5:8) and the Spirit creates fellowship among believers (Eph. 4:3).

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2 Corinthians

Following the salutation (1:1–2), there is a lengthy thanksgiving (1:3–11). Such thanksgiving sections are characteristically placed after the salutation in many Hellenistic letters, including twelve of the thirteen letters in the Pauline corpus (the exception is Galatians); but this one is particularly long and emotional and focuses rather more on Paul's experiences (of "a deadly peril," 1:10) than is usually the case.

Paul plunges into a defense of his travel plans (1:12–2:13). He denies that he has acted in a worldly or fickle manner (1:12–14). After reviewing his plans

(1:15–22), he explains the reason why he changed them: he was reluctant to cause the Corinthians as much grief as he had on an earlier visit (1:23–2:4). This leads to instruction on how to forgive and comfort someone the congregation had properly punished, apparently for opposing Paul and thereby damaging the Corinthian believers (2:5–11). Paul then begins the recital of the events that have led to the writing of the present letter, including the failure of Titus to meet Paul in Troas with a report on the Corinthians, with the result that Paul sets out for Macedonia himself, apparently on the way to find out what was going on (2:12–13). The recital is broken up by an outburst of praise (2:14–17), followed by a long section that not only articulates probing perspectives on the nature of Christian ministry but ties this stance to a proper estimate of the tension between inaugurated and futurist eschatology (2:14–7:4).

Paul begins this long section by insisting that God himself has made the apostle competent for this ministry, which divides people around him as he serves as "the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing" (2:14–3:6). This leads to a comparison and contrast between ministry under the old covenant and under the new (3:7–18). Since Paul has received this new-covenant ministry by the mercy of God, he is committed to integrity in the proclamation of the "gospel of the glory of Christ," regardless of how he himself is received (4:1–6). The treasure is Christ; the earthenware vessel in which the treasure is contained is Paul and his ministry (4:7–18). That does not mean this earthenware vessel will always be poor and perishing; the ultimate prospect is the transformation that comes when the "heavenly dwelling" swallows up Paul's mortality in life (5:1–10). With such a prospect before him, Paul's motives in life and ministry are to please Christ, not those to whom he ministers. Yet far from suggesting indifference toward his hearers, this gospel and this view of ministry ensure that it is nothing less than the love of Christ that compels him to serve as Christ's ambassador, proclaiming reconciliation and a new beginning on the basis of Christ's sacrifice for sins (5:16–21). Therefore Paul pleads with the Corinthians to have a heart open to God and to God's ambassador, so as not to receive God's grace in vain (6:1–13); for they must understand that proper response to God is exclusive (6:14–7:1). So Paul brings his appeal to a close (7:2–4).

At this point, Paul resumes his account of the return of Titus and the encouraging report he brought with him (7:5–16). Paul is almost euphoric with transparent relief that the Corinthians have responded with repentance and godly sorrow to the earlier rebukes by visit and letter. This means it is possible for Paul to bring up a matter of constant concern to him at this stage of his ministry, namely, the collection for the Christians in Jerusalem and the Corinthians' part in it (8:1–9:15). The Macedonians had set a high standard by their sacrificial giving (8:1–6); the Corinthians, who had been the first to respond, are now exhorted to bring the project to completion as fruitfully as they began it (8:7–15). Titus's mission is designed to further the cause (8:16–24) and to prepare the Corinthians

for a visit by Paul himself, possibly accompanied by some Macedonians (9:1–5). Paul concludes by setting the collection within a theological framework that ties this ministry to the gospel and to the glory of God (9:6–15).

The nature of the relationship between chapters 1–9 and 10–13 is disputed (see the section “Occasion” below), but the latter chapters seem to depict Paul’s response to a fresh outbreak of opposition at Corinth. Paul appeals for a faith that is obedient (10:1–6) and condemns the opposition for its ugly boasting and one-upmanship (10:7–18). In 11:1–15 he exposes the false apostles who have usurped authority in the church and denounces their false criteria. Then, answering fools according to their folly, Paul engages in a little boasting of his own—by inverting all the criteria of his opponents and boasting in things they would despise (11:16–33). In fact, Paul boasts in weakness, because he understands that his weakness is the condition under which the power of God powerfully operates through him (12:1–10). The Corinthians themselves are to blame for not taking decisive action against the opponents, who are channeling the church toward a cross-disowning triumphalism. Paul contrasts his own motives (12:11–21), begging the Corinthian believers to reconsider their course and warning them that if necessary, he will take strong action when he arrives on his third visit (13:1–10). The epistle ends with a final appeal, greetings, and the words of “the grace” (13:11–13 [vv. 11–14 in TNIV]).

Information on Audience/What of 2 Corinthians:

- What type of writing is this? (2 Cor. 1:1-2 may help/info. sheets.)
- Who is the audience? (2 Cor. 1:1-2)
- What do we know about them from the Bible? (See: Acts 18:1-17; 1 Corinthians; etc.)
- What else can we infer/know about them and their world? (See info. below.)

2 Corinthians 1:1-2

New International Version (NIV, 2011)

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God in Corinth, together with all his holy people throughout Achaia:

2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

canonical 2 Corinthians is a composite letter, comprising two or more separate letters, but a strong case can be made for its integrity and its being despatched as a simple composition, even if the actual writing of the document occurred over a period of time during which the situation at Corinth changed.

Chapters 1 – 7

The major theme of these chapters is 'comfort in the midst of affliction' (cf. 1:4).

Suffering

In this epistle there are two lengthy lists of Paul's apostolic 'sufferings' (viz. 6:4–10 and 11:23–29) but his theology of Christian suffering is most apparent in 1:3–11. He had recently experienced some unspecified affliction in the province of Asia that caused him to be so utterly and unbearably crushed that he was forced to renounce all hope of survival (1:8). But 'God had graciously intervened to deliver him and would do so again provided the Corinthians cooperated in "prayer" (1:10–11). Several principles emerge from Paul's discussion.

1. Suffering endured patiently deepens our appreciation of God's character, in particular his limitless compassion and never-failing "comfort" (1:3–4; cf. Ps. 145:9; Is. 51:3, 12).

2. Suffering drives us to trust God alone. Paul's desperate plight had undermined his self-reliance and compelled him to depend totally on the God who raises the dead and who can therefore rescue the dying from the grip of "death" (1:9).

3. Suffering leads to identification with 'Jesus Christ. Paul could identify his sufferings as 'the sufferings of Christ' (1:5) probably because they befell him as 'a person in Christ' (12:2) who was engaged in the service of Christ (4:11). They were Christ's sufferings because they contributed to the fulfilment of the suffering destined for the Body of Christ (Acts 14:22; Col. 1:24), or because Christ continued to identify himself with his afflicted 'church' (Acts 9:4–5).

4. The experience of God's comfort (his help, consolation and encouragement) in our suffering qualifies, equips and obliges us to comfort others undergoing any type of suffering (1:4, 6). The apostle's thought seems to imply four stages: Paul's own sufferings (which are Christ's sufferings, 1:4); his experience of God's comfort mediated

through Christ (1:5); the Corinthians' sufferings; their experience of God's comfort mediated through Paul (1:6–7).

5. Suffering is not for ever. In comparison with the weighty and eternal "glory that is produced by suffering patiently endured, suffering is both light and momentary (4:17; cf. Rom. 8:17–18). Glory follows suffering (cf. Luke 24:26; 1 Pet. 1:11; 5:9–10).

Death and resurrection

Paul's disconcerting encounter with death (1:8–11), his incessant suffering (11:23–29; cf. 1 Cor. 15:31, 'Not a day but I am at death's door,' Moffatt), and his progressive physical debilitation (4:16) prompted him to reflect as never before on the nature of death for the Christian. Negatively, death means the destruction of the earthly tent-dwelling (5:1), the loss of both physical corporeality (we are no longer 'in the flesh') and earthly corporateness (we are no longer 'in Adam', 1 Cor. 15:18; 1 Thess. 4:16). Positively, death brings departure from mortal embodiment to the presence of the Lord (5:8; cf. Phil. 1:23). A departure implies a destination as well as an evacuation, a 'to' as well as a 'from'. At death, believers are not left homeless but experience a change in their place of residence. Earthly embodiment means spatial distance or exile from the immediate presence of the Lord (5:6), since the Christian pilgrimage is in the realm of faith, not the realm of sight (5:7). But the same moment of death that marks the dismantling of the transitory tent of the physical body also marks the entrance into permanent residence 'with the Lord' (5:8) and therefore the enjoyment of active and mutual fellowship with him.

Although the terms 'raise' and 'resurrection' are not found in 5:1–10 (but see 4:14) it is clear, as Paul describes the sources of divine comfort that are afforded the believer who faces the possibility of death, that these bring enriched communion with Christ (5:7–8) but also the certainty of the future possession of a 'spiritual body' (5:1; cf. 1 Cor. 15:44) and the knowledge that the indwelling Spirit (see 'Holy Spirit') is God's pledge of a resurrection transformation (5:4–5). This splendid hope (5:1–8), along with accountability to Christ (5:10), prompt the believer to seek the Master's constant approval (5:9).

canonical 2 Corinthians is a composite letter, comprising two or more separate letters, but a strong case can be made for its integrity and its being despatched as a simple composition, even if the actual writing of the document occurred over a period of time during which the situation at Corinth changed.

with this question in Romans 5–8. He wants first to assure believers that their justification secures their final salvation: they need not fear the verdict of the last day (see esp. 5:9–10; 8:29–30). But he also wants to assure them of God's provision for them during their earthly pilgrimage. In Christ, they have been removed from the lordship and mastery of sin. Sin no longer compels the believer to act in ways contrary to God's will. A new obedience, prompted by the believer's submission to Christ as Lord, is now possible and, indeed, required (ch. 6). Nor does the law, used by sin to stimulate disobedience to God, have any hold on the believer (ch. 7). Positively, God sends the Holy Spirit to assure believers of their new status (8:14–17), to stimulate "hope" (8:18–25) and to empower for works of service (8:5–13).

Theology and ethics

No analysis of the theology of Romans would be complete without recognition of the very practical outcome of the theology that Paul unfolds in the letter. Paul summons believers, 'in view of God's mercy' (set out in chs. 1–11), to offer their bodies as sacrifices to God (12:1). Comprehension of the benefits God has secured for us in Christ should stimulate a life of sacrificial obedience, some aspects of which Paul spells out in 12:3–15:13.

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D. J. MOO

1 CORINTHIANS

Recent research

A flood of recent research, mainly in the 1990s, has substantially changed perceptions of this epistle and its theological importance. Research on the social world of Corinth in the era of *Paul has revealed striking reson-

ances with secular cultures of our own day: an obsessive concern about reputation and status in the eyes of others; self-promotion to win applause and to gain influence; ambition to succeed, often by manipulating networks of influence. Rhetoric was more concerned with audience-approval ratings than with truth; people valued autonomy and 'rights'. Such a social background places Paul's message of divine "grace and the cross of *Jesus Christ into the sharpest possible focus. Contrary to cultural expectations at Corinth, the cross offered not status-enhancement but an affront, a reversal of the whole value-system of non-Christian Corinth.

It is not the case, as older modern commentators often suggest, that Christian behaviour at Corinth simply 'relapsed' into pagan habits, or was influenced unduly by new teaching. Rather, Christians' appropriation of the cross had insufficiently pervaded their attitudes. Hence, in his excellent commentary, W. Schrage (*Der erste Brief an die Korinther*) observes that Paul proclaims the cross not simply to the world but also as 'ground and criterion of church and apostle' (vol. 1, p. 165). The cross addressed Corinth in ways which resonate with its message for today's "churches. No longer should 1 Corinthians be overshadowed by a supposedly more 'theological' Romans.

The theology of the cross and the social world of Corinth

Roman Corinth and the power of patrons

Research in the 1990s has shown more clearly than ever before that after 44 BC (when the city was refounded and resettled by Julius Caesar) we should regard Corinth as primarily a Roman city, even if its location was in Greece. Caesar settled his Roman veterans and their households there, and these set the tone until after Paul's lifetime. However, since the city was situated on a narrow isthmus with its harbour of Lechaëum serving the West, and its port of Cenchreæ the East, Corinth stood at a north-south/east-west crossroads for shipping and for commercial business. A mixture of entrepreneurs, traders, freedmen and slaves soon swelled the population to expand a Roman nucleus of settlers into a city where people hoped to make their fortune, win power and gain honour. Plutarch (c. AD 50–120) observes that in such a culture

the Roman system of patronage provided an all too easy route to fame and fortune. To enjoy the mutual benefits of the client-patron relation permitted the less influential to climb 'just as ivy climbs by twining itself around a strong tree' (*Moralia*, 805 E-F). On one side, patrons provided their clients with influence and contacts. On the other side 'the recipient of a *beneficium* was expected to publicize the generosity of his patron' (A. D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*, p. 32; cf. pp. 8-39). Extensive research on this aspect and its impact on our epistle has been carried out by Clarke, J. K. Chow (*Patronage and Power*) and others. Against this background Paul declares, 'Let no-one glory in human persons' (1 Cor. 3:21; author's translation).

Obsession with status and self-promotion

Archaeological evidence reveals inscriptions which publicized the generosity of benefactors as a means of promoting their reputation. Yet the research of B. Witherington (*Conflict and Community in Corinth*) and others demonstrates that self-promotion ran through every level of society: 'Self-promotion had become an art form ... People ... lived within an honour-shame orientation. Corinth was a magnet for the socially ambitious ... status-hungry people' (Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, pp. 8, 20, 24). Paul exposes the huge gap between such 'worldly wisdom' and the proclamation of the cross. The Corinthians, judging from their behaviour, apparently perceived even their Christian status as a tool for self-affirmation and self-promotion: 'You have been made rich ... You reign as kings - if only you did!' (4:8); whereas the apostles are working-class 'manual labourers ... the world's scum ... the scrapings from everyone's shoes' (4:12-13). The cross addresses not moralism (cf. Galatians and Romans) but the self-absorption which characterizes much of secular and even 'church' attitudes today.

New perspectives on the cross

By contrast, Paul insists that if the 'gospel is used manipulatively for self-esteem, 'the cross of Christ becomes nullified' (1:17). To those whose horizons are those of 'the wisdom of the world' the cross is 'folly' (1:18). 'God destroys worldly 'wisdom. If some find the cross 'an affront ... folly ... to those who are

called [it is] God's power, God's wisdom' (1:24). The cross passes 'judgment on those who perceive themselves as 'something' but lifts up 'the nothings' (1:28). 'Glory' is not for patrons, social climbers, or those who claim special 'knowledge' (8:1) or special 'gifts', for with regard to 'gifts' (Gk. *charismata*) 'what do you have that you did not receive?' (4:7). Hence, 'let the person who glories, glory in the Lord' (1:31). 'Status' is found in Christ, not in one's own aspirations (1:30). Grace through the cross is no less prominent here than in Romans, but it is addressed to a social situation which offers special resonances with society today (cf. 1:6; 1:30-31; 3:2-3; 4:7-8; 6:11; 13:10).

Alexander Brown and Raymond Pickett place this cross-centred theology in sharp focus. Brown urges that the proclamation of the cross constitutes a transforming and formative speech-act (*The Cross and Human Transformation*, pp. 13-30). The theology of the cross expounded in chapters 1 - 2 is 'inseparable from the ... combined love and service outlined in chs. 3 - 14 and from the ... transfigured body in ch. 15' (p. 12; cf. pp. 107-152). Pickett shows how 'Christian identity' in this epistle is seen 'in terms of ... response to "the word of the cross"' as against 'the wisdom of the world'. An identity crisis arises from many at Corinth's 'belonging to two discrepant universes of meaning' (*The Cross in Corinth*, pp. 59-62).

Research on rhetoric: some implications for preaching, ministry and the church

A rhetoric of audience-applause

Quintilian disapproved of the kind of audience-pleasing rhetoric which departed from earlier Roman traditions: 'Every effusion is greeted with a storm of ready-made applause ... The result is vanity and empty self-sufficiency' (*Institutio Oratoria* 2:2:9-12). S. Pogoloff has shown how at Corinth rhetoric was intertwined with status and the 'game' of audience-approval. As with chat-show hosts today, people became 'fans' of particular orators. Many at Corinth would have liked Paul to turn 'professional' and win prestige and admiration with his cleverness (just as some today want ministers to ape chat-show hosts). They wanted Paul to be like 'the sophists, those "visiting professional preachers" who relied upon ... admirers, all

OCCASION

Historical Reconstruction

Paul first preached the gospel in Corinth during his second missionary journey (Acts 18). Supporting himself with his trade as a tentmaker or leatherworker, he lived with Aquila and Priscilla, who had recently moved to Corinth from Rome (Acts 18:1–3). As usual, Paul began his ministry by trying to convince all who attended the synagogue, Jews and Gentiles alike, that Jesus was

the promised Messiah (v. 4). Once Timothy and Silas rejoined him, Paul's ministry increased, possibly in part because they brought gifts from the Macedonian churches that freed him to devote more time to preaching (v. 5; cf. 17:14). As his ministry increased, so did the opposition. Paul was forced to move his ministry next door to the house of Titius Justus. So fruitful was his evangelism that not only many pagans but Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire family believed in the Lord Jesus (vv. 7–8).

Only recently delivered from bruising punishment in Philippi (Acts 16), and having just barely escaped similar battering in Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17), Paul approached Corinth "in weakness with great fear and trembling" (1 Cor. 2:3), but was encouraged by a dream in which the exalted Christ assured him of safety and much fruit (Acts 18:9–10). Paul stayed a year and a half, laying the only possible foundation, Jesus Christ himself (1 Cor. 3:10–11). After seeing the church well established, Paul left Corinth by ship (probably in the spring of A.D. 51; see discussion below in the section "Date"), crossing the Aegean Sea with Priscilla and Aquila, whom he left in Ephesus while he headed for Jerusalem—hoping, perhaps (if we follow the Western text of Acts 18:21), to arrive there before the Feast (Passover or Pentecost). He did not remain long in Jerusalem but soon returned to his home church in Antioch and shortly after returned to Ephesus. There he began an enormously fruitful ministry of two and a half years (probably the autumn of 52 to the spring of 55). During that period he wrote 1 Corinthians.

Meanwhile, others had come to build on the foundation that Paul had laid in Corinth. Apollos worked there (1 Cor. 3:6), and probably Peter as well.² There is no evidence that these or other leaders had fostered a party spirit, consciously attempting to form a coterie of personal devotees. Nevertheless, doubtless owing to factors still to be examined, the spiritually immature Corinthians formed partisan groupings that claimed to follow this or that leader (1 Cor. 1:11). The church as a whole was less than satisfied with Paul's leadership (1 Cor. 4:3, 15; 9:1–2), and the integrity of its life was marred by abuses at the Lord's Table (11:17–34), at least one notorious case of immorality (5:1–5; cf. 6:12–20), public litigation among members (6:1–8), uncertainties about the place of marriage (chap. 7) and the propriety of eating food that had been offered to idols (chap. 8), infatuation with the more spectacular of the charismatic gifts without any profound commitment to mutual love (chaps. 12–14), and a decidedly aberrant view of the resurrection (chap. 15).

How Paul first came to hear of some of these problems we cannot be sure, but apparently in response to a communication from them, he wrote them a

letter (referred to in 1 Cor. 5:9), most of whose contents are lost, but which forbade association with immoral people. This letter, sometimes referred to as "the previous letter," we may designate *Corinthians A*. Most scholars agree that it has not survived (though see discussion below). Perhaps the Corinthians had posed a question about church discipline, and Paul assumed this question as the context of his response, while in fact some of his readers took his response in the widest sense and thus misinterpreted him (1 Cor. 5:9–13).

At some point during his Ephesian ministry, Paul received reports from "some from Chloe's household" (1:11) about the ugly factionalism in Corinth. The three official delegates of the church—Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17)—brought not only the gift from the Corinthians but also the church's letter and their own verbal reports, which together established Paul's agenda as he wrote 1 Corinthians (which might be designated *Corinthians B*).

When Paul sent off 1 Corinthians, he fully intended to remain in Ephesus until Pentecost (probably A.D. 55), then cross the Aegean to Macedonia, visit the churches there, and travel south to Corinth, where he expected to remain "awhile, or even spend the winter" (16:5–8). Meanwhile, he sent Timothy, exhorting the Corinthians to receive him warmly and "send him on his way in peace" (1 Cor. 16:10–11; cf. Acts 19:22) so that he could return to Paul, presumably with a report. After sending the letter, Paul changed his plans a little: he now proposed to visit Corinth twice, once on the way to Macedonia and once on the way back, intending to sail from Corinth to Judea (2 Cor. 1:15–16). On this return leg he hoped to collect considerable money from Macedonia and Achaia (including Corinth) for the relief of the believers in Jerusalem, who were suffering from famine and persecution.

When he formulated these plans, Paul apparently felt no urgency to get to Corinth. After all, he was in no hurry to leave Ephesus, since "a great door for effective work" (1 Cor. 16:9) was still open for him there. But when Timothy arrived in Corinth, he found the situation beyond his ability to manage. Even 1 Corinthians, the apostle's letter, had not had the good effect Paul had envisaged. Whether Timothy himself returned with a grim report, or Paul found out about the dire situation some other way, the apostle abandoned any thought of further delay and immediately set out for Corinth. This turned into a distressing confrontation that Paul himself had warned the Corinthians they should avoid (1 Cor. 4:21)—a "painful visit," to use Paul's language (2 Cor. 2:1). We cannot determine whether or not *Corinthians B* (= 1 Corinthians) had helped the Corinthian believers resolve a number of matters, but it is quite clear that animus against Paul was still very strong and focused in one or two leaders whom the Corinthians either tacitly supported or refused to condemn. About the same time, and probably before the "painful visit," the church had been invaded by some self-designated Christian leaders. Probably they called themselves apostles (2 Cor. 11:13–15) and carried letters of recommendation with

them (cf. 2 Cor. 3:1–3). They were not apostles in the way Paul was, a witness of the resurrection with a personal commission from Christ to evangelize where Christ was not known; they were probably apostles in the general sense that they were agents of others who had commissioned them. Possibly they were in some sense Judaizers,³ that is, those who were trying to bring the church more into line with Jewish piety and practice (see 2 Cor. 11:16ff.)—though that point is disputed, as we shall see. It is far more likely that, despite any Jewish background they enjoyed (cf. 2 Cor. 11:21–22), they were deeply integrated into Greco-Roman life (see further discussion below in the section “The Character of Paul’s Opponents”).

From Paul’s perspective at the time, the “painful visit” was a complete fiasco. At least one of the opponents had attacked him in deeply insulting ways (2 Cor. 2:5–8, 10; 7:12); worse, the work of the gospel was in serious jeopardy. Why Paul left at this point is uncertain. Perhaps he hoped time would heal some of the wounds and bring the Corinthians to their senses; perhaps he had other pressing engagements. In any case, he resolved not to return immediately. This opened him up to the charge of being fickle, willing to change his commitments at a whim, even though the fundamental reason why he did not return was to spare them the pain of another confrontation (2 Cor. 1:16ff.). But this did not mean Paul was prepared to let the situation slide. He sent them another letter, which we may designate Corinthians C. Written “out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears” (2 Cor. 2:4), this letter assured the Corinthians of Paul’s love for them but also laid down the standards he expected in the churches in his charge and sought to determine if they would meet those standards (2:9). For this reason, Corinthians C is sometimes called the “tearful letter” or the “severe letter.” Delivered by Titus (who may have been a more forceful person than Timothy), this letter demanded the punishment of the ring-leader who had maligned and opposed Paul so maliciously (2:3–9; 7:8–12). In all probability this letter has also been lost.⁴

Titus also had the responsibility to organize the collection for Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:6). The fact that Paul could still expect the Corinthians to participate is evidence that he did not, despite the painful visit, regard the church as fundamentally apostate. He knew of their wealth and had boasted of their initial willingness not only to Titus (7:14) but also to the Macedonians (9:2). Probably he was afraid that some of the animus against him would degenerate into an unwillingness to cooperate in this financial assistance plan; probably he feared that the interlopers were by their strenuous demands for financial support (11:2, 12–20; 12:14) siphoning off funds that Paul felt should go to assist the poor believers in Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, Paul's ministry in Ephesus was providing another set of dangers and challenges, a "deadly peril" such that he "despaired of life itself," feeling upon himself "the sentence of death" (2 Cor. 1:8–10). We know nothing of the details. Shortly after the Demetrius riot (Acts 19:23–20:1), however, Paul left Ephesus for Troas (2 Cor. 2:12, 13—"Troas" might refer either to the port city or to the Troad region in which it lay), where he hoped not only to preach the gospel but to meet Titus returning with news of Corinth. Only the first of these hopes was happily realized. On the one hand, he "found that the Lord had opened a door" for him (2 Cor. 2:12); on the other, as he wrote, "I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there" (2 Cor. 2:13). So Paul left Troas and headed for Macedonia (2:13); apparently, he had established a contingency plan to meet Titus there, should the meeting at Troas not take place. In Macedonia Paul pursued both his pastoral ministry (Acts 20:1–2) and his organizing of the collection for the Jerusalem believers (2 Cor. 8:1–4; 9:2). These churches were themselves facing "a very severe trial" and "extreme poverty" (8:2), owing not least to active persecution; but worse still, from Paul's perspective, was that Titus had not yet shown up, so he still had no idea how his severe letter had been received in Corinth. "When we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within" (7:5).

Titus soon arrived, and Paul's distress rapidly changed to near euphoria (2 Cor. 7:6–7). Immediately after sending the severe letter, he had suffered second thoughts, fearing that he might hurt the Corinthians unduly; but with Titus's encouraging report, Paul's fear was displaced by joy. If his letter had wounded them, it was "only for a little while" (7:8). "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret," Paul observes, "but

worldly sorrow brings death" (7:10). Indeed, Paul's entire response, at least in 2 Corinthians 1–9, breathes an atmosphere of bruised relations that have recently eased. There is a noticeable sigh of relief that the worst is over.

That is what makes 2 Corinthians 10–13 so difficult to interpret: the tone in these chapters assumes that the situation in Corinth had become desperately dangerous yet again. Any further historical reconstruction is inextricably tied

DATE

Quite apart from constraints imposed on the dating of these epistles by the need to fit Paul's movements and writings together, there is one fixed point. There is an inscription recording a rescript of the Emperor Claudius to the people of Delphi that mentions Gallio as holding the office of proconsul in Achaia during the period of Claudius's twenty-sixth acclamation as *imperator*⁸⁷—a period known from other inscriptions⁸⁸ to cover the first seven months of A.D. 52.⁸⁹ Proconsuls

normally began their tour of duty on July 1, which means that Gallio probably ascended to the proconsulship on July 1, 51. However, it is possible that the rescript belongs to the very end of the seven-month period, in which case Gallio may have taken up his duties on July 1, 52. The latter date leaves only one month for the rescript, so the former date is perhaps marginally more likely.⁹⁰

If the Jews made their united attack on Paul (Acts 18:12) fairly early during Gallio's proconsulship, then probably it was in the autumn of A.D. 51. After the case was dismissed, Paul stayed in Corinth for some time (Acts 18:18) and then sailed for Syria, probably in the spring of 52. Paul's two-and-a-half-year stint in Ephesus would have taken him to the autumn of 55. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians while he was in Ephesus, some time before Pentecost (16:8), probably during his last year—that is, early in 55, with 2 Corinthians being complete within the next year or so. By that time he was in Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:12–13; 7:5; 8:1–5; 9:2). Primarily because of the uncertainty over the beginning date of Gallio's proconsulship, all of these dates could be advanced by one year.

CONTENTS

Both Corinthian epistles are occasional letters, that is, they are letters addressed to specific people and occasioned by concrete issues; the letter form is not a mere literary device by which the author shapes his views for general publication (sometimes called "tractate letters"). Questions have been raised about the cohesiveness and the authenticity of parts of these epistles, especially the second. These will be discussed below. As the texts stand, however, the letters fall into two books.

[illegible][illegible]

(1:15–22), he explains the reason why he changed them: he was reluctant to cause the Corinthians as much grief as he had on an earlier visit (1:23–2:4). This leads to instruction on how to forgive and comfort someone the congregation had properly punished, apparently for opposing Paul and thereby damaging the Corinthian believers (2:5–11). Paul then begins the recital of the events that have led to the writing of the present letter, including the failure of Titus to meet Paul in Troas with a report on the Corinthians, with the result that Paul sets out for Macedonia himself, apparently on the way to find out what was going on (2:12–13). The recital is broken up by an outburst of praise (2:14–17), followed by a long section that not only articulates probing perspectives on the nature of Christian ministry but ties this stance to a proper estimate of the tension between inaugurated and futurist eschatology (2:14–7:4).

Paul begins this long section by insisting that God himself has made the apostle competent for this ministry, which divides people around him as he serves as "the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing" (2:14-3:6). This leads to a comparison and contrast between ministry under the old covenant and under the new (3:7-18). Since Paul has received this new-covenant ministry by the mercy of God, he is committed to integrity in the proclamation of the "gospel of the glory of Christ," regardless of how he himself is received (4:1-6). The treasure is Christ; the earthenware vessel in which the treasure is contained is Paul and his ministry (4:7-18). That does not mean this earthenware vessel will always be poor and perishing: the ultimate prospect is the transformation that comes when the "heavenly dwelling" swallows up Paul's mortality in life (5:1-10). With such a prospect before him, Paul's motives in life and ministry are to please Christ, not those to whom he ministers. Yet far from suggesting indifference toward his hearers, this gospel and this view of ministry ensure that it is nothing less than the love of Christ that compels him to serve as Christ's ambassador, proclaiming reconciliation and a new beginning on the basis of Christ's sacrifice for sins (5:16-21). Therefore Paul pleads with the Corinthians to have a heart open to God and to God's ambassador, so as not to receive God's grace in vain (6:1-13); for they must understand that proper response to God is exclusive (6:14-7:1). So Paul brings his appeal to a close (7:2-4).

At this point, Paul resumes his account of the return of Titus and the encouraging report he brought with him (7:5–16). Paul is almost euphoric with transparent relief that the Corinthians have responded with repentance and godly sorrow to the earlier rebukes by visit and letter. This means it is possible for Paul to bring up a matter of constant concern to him at this stage of his ministry, namely, the collection for the Christians in Jerusalem and the Corinthians' part in it (8:1–9:15). The Macedonians had set a high standard by their sacrificial giving (8:1–6); the Corinthians, who had been the first to respond, are now exhorted to bring the project to completion as fruitfully as they began it (8:7–15). Titus's mission is designed to further the cause (8:16–24) and to prepare the Corinthians

for a visit by Paul himself, possibly accompanied by some Macedonians (9:1–5). Paul concludes by setting the collection within a theological framework that ties this ministry to the gospel and to the glory of God (9:6–15).

The nature of the relationship between chapters 1–9 and 10–13 is disputed (see the section “Occasion” below), but the latter chapters seem to depict Paul’s response to a fresh outbreak of opposition at Corinth. Paul appeals for a faith that is obedient (10:1–6) and condemns the opposition for its ugly boasting and one-upmanship (10:7–18). In 11:1–15 he exposes the false apostles who have usurped authority in the church and denounces their false criteria. Then, answering fools according to their folly, Paul engages in a little boasting of his own—by inverting all the criteria of his opponents and boasting in things they would despise (11:16–33). In fact, Paul boasts in weakness, because he understands that his weakness is the condition under which the power of God powerfully operates through him (12:1–10). The Corinthians themselves are to blame for not taking decisive action against the opponents, who are channeling the church toward a cross-disowning triumphalism. Paul contrasts his own motives (12:11–21), begging the Corinthian believers to reconsider their course and warning them that if necessary, he will take strong action when he arrives on his third visit (13:1–10). The epistle ends with a final appeal, greetings, and the words of “the grace” (13:11–13 [vv. 11–14 in TNIV]).

DESTINATION

Corinth was located on the isthmus that connects the Peloponnese with the rest of Greece. Not only was it ideally situated to control north-south trade, but because the port of Lechæum lay a mile and a half to the north (on the Gulf of Corinth) and Cenchreæ (Rom. 16:1) was just over seven miles to the east on the Saronic Gulf, it also provided an indispensable land link between east and west.

The wealthy and ancient city of Corinth was utterly destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C., and its citizens were killed or sold into slavery. Roman

might ensured that the prohibition against rebuilding it was respected. Nevertheless, a century later Julius Caesar founded the city afresh, this time as a Roman colony, and from 29 B.C. on, it served as the seat of a proconsul and the capital of the senatorial province of Achaia. The new city was populated by people from various parts of the empire, doubtless not a few of them retired soldiers. According to Strabo (*Geog.* 8.6.23c), many were freedmen from Rome, whose status was only a cut above slaves. Jews were certainly included in the new citizenry (a broken inscription of uncertain date, with the words "Synagogue of the Hebrews," has been discovered, confirming Acts 18:4). Some Greeks were also residents of the new Corinth, perhaps large numbers of them; but the Romans dominated the scene with their laws, culture, and religion. Much of the empire had been thoroughly Hellenized, however, so not only was the lingua franca Greek but doubtless many ties—religious, philosophical, and cultural—were quickly reestablished with the rest of the Greek peninsula. From Asia and Egypt came various mystery cults. Because there was no landed aristocracy in the new Corinth, there arose an aristocracy of wealth. Inevitably, the poor were correspondingly despised or ignored (see 1 Cor. 11:17–22).

It is important not to read the old city's character into the new city (as Pausanias 2.3.7 already makes clear). Old Corinth had such a notorious reputation that "to Corinthianize" could mean "to fornicate," and "Corinthian girl" was a way of referring to a whore. Clay votives of human genitals have come down to us from the old city. They were offered to Asclepius, the god of healing, in the hope that that part of the body, suffering from venereal disease, would be healed. Probably Strabo's description of the one thousand temple prostitutes of the old city's temple of Aphrodite was exaggerated,¹ but the reality must have been bad enough to win such an egregious reputation. Even so, it is far from clear that such associations were carried across to the new city; but traditions like that die hard; and as a great port city, Corinth likely did not establish a reputation for moral probity (see 1 Cor. 6:12ff.).