

2 CORINTHIANS

INTRO

Jerome Murphy-O'Connor (M-O'C): "the most extraordinary letter of the New Testament." Timothy helped write about 75%, indicated by "we." 25% by Paul alone in passages that don't deal with Timothy, namely consequences of the "intermediate visit" (1:15-17, 1:23-2:13, 7:3-12, and the collection, 8:8-15, 9:1-15). //// May have been written in 57 while Paul was actually en route to Corinth. So both epistles to the Corinthians were written before the epistle to the Romans. In 2 Cor 13:1, he says this will be his **third** visit. The second visit is thought to have been short and resulted in a failure to convince hard-liners that Paul was actually an apostle even though he had never met Jesus. In 2 Cor 2:4 he says he wrote in anguish about that, and that letter is probably now the last four chapters of 1 Corinthians. That angry letter was carried to Corinth by Titus, a companion never mentioned in Acts but several times in the epistles. Titus was an uncircumcised Greek Gentile (Gal 2:3). Paul remains worried (2 Cor 2:1) and leaves Ephesus after the silversmith's riot -- probably but not necessarily because of it -- and goes to Troas (2 Cor 2:13). He stayed there for a month (according to M-O'C, despite Acts 20:6) and sailed to Neapolis. He may have waited there or in Philippi for Titus to return with the Corinthians' response to his "Severe Letter." Titus finally arrives and the word from Corinth is good (2 Cor 7:6-9). The man who was primarily responsible for Paul's anguish has been punished (2 Cor 5-7). This person who had insulted Paul was probably an "intruder" from Antioch, who apparently had preceded Paul to Corinth and had been preaching the doctrine of the Judaizers as they had in Galatia and Philippi. He and the other Judaizers established a rapport with the "spirit-people." Much of 2 Corinthians is an attempt to split up this alliance.

- 1) 1:1 – Note that in 1 Corinthians Paul addresses the church in Corinth. Here he addresses "all the saints in Achaia," which would be the entire Peloponnese (the southern part of what is now called Greece, south of Corinth).
- 2) 1:3-10 – Paul follows classic speech openings, using what might be called an *exordium*: lays down themes that will suffuse the rest of the letter: 1) lexicon of difficulties, 2) God's compassion, 3) abundance. /// Note also that Paul blesses God, adopting and adapting Jewish practice, while we ask for God's blessing on us. 3) 1:7 – No one know what this "suffering" was.
- 4) 1:22 – The Greek word is "arraban," used in commerce, meaning "earnest money."
- 5) 2:4 – Probably now the last four chapters of 1 Cor (see #1, these footnotes).
- 6) 2:14-17 – Aromatic substances were carried in Roman victory processions, and in religious processions such as honoring Dionysus and Isis.
- 7) 3:1-8. The "letters of recommendation" prove to M-O'C that the "intruders" were Jewish Christians from Antioch (see note #1). They presented themselves as "servants of the new covenant" as predicted in Jeremiah 31:33.
- 8) 3:2-3 – Echoes Jeremiah 31:33, "This is the (new) covenant which I will make with the house of Israel...I will place the law within them and write it upon their hearts." And Ezekiel 34:1, where the Lord instructs Moses to cut two stone tablets and then writes on them.
- 9) 4:7 – The "treasure" is Paul's just-described new covenant ministry and the glory of God represented within it. The metaphor – "contained in earthenware jars" – indicates that the power enabling the whole enterprise is from God and not from (weak and powerless) us. It also indicates that Paul thinks that our physical problems are everyday reminders of Christ's death and our association with it.

- 10) 4:10-11. In both verses, the “life of Jesus” refers to the resurrection. M-O’C: “...the summit of 2 Corinthians, and the most profound insight ever articulated as to the meaning of suffering and the nature of authentic ministry.” Paul did not equate himself with Jesus, but recognized that “were Jesus to have been the only one to demonstrate the humanity desired by the Creator, its revelation would have been dismissed as irrelevant.” He accepted “being Jesus” for his converts.
- 11) 4:12 – Paul appeals directly for sympathy from the Corinthians: death is at work in him (his suffering) while he is trying to instill life in the Corinthians.
- 12) 5:6-10 – Echoes Philippians 1:12-14 where Paul says he would rather die and be with the Lord Jesus, but out of consideration for the Philippians he will stay with them. /// The term “recompense” is the same one used to indicate wages paid to workers. Judgment will not be on one’s faith because that is a gift from God, but rather on the works faith has produced in the person’s life. (See Romans 2:6) v. 6 – A classic doctrine of Philo of Alexandria.
- 13) 5:11 – “Fear of the Lord” – in biblical tradition describes post-exilic faithfulness, devotees of Yahweh – Deut. 6:2, 13, 10:20 etcetc.
- 14) 5:13 – “beside ourselves” refers to Paul’s visions, revelations, glossolalia, which is between Paul and God alone, not to others. “In our right mind” refers to balanced, thoughtful, purposeful evaluation of the self, which is to the advantage of his converts.
- 15) 5:14 – “love of Christ” – love coming **from** Christ, not our love **for** him – the original Greek makes this quite (but not entirely) clear.
- 16) 5:21 – For our sake he (God) made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (in him [Jesus]). “Christ became sin” – Christ identified with humans (sinners) by becoming one of them in their sin, though he himself was sinless. (Paradox? Oxymoron? Contradiction?)
- 17) 6:4 – The Greek word used here for “endurance” is **hypomone**, untranslatable. It is, according to Chrysostom, “the root of all goods, the mother of piety, the fruit that never withers, a fortress never taken, a harbor that knows no storms, the queen of virtues, the foundation of right action, peace in war, calm in tempest, security in plots.” Barclay: “the courageous and triumphant ability to pass the breaking point and not to break, the ability to sit with folded hands and bowed head and let a torrent of troubles sweep over one.”
- 18) 6:14 to 7:1 may be the letter spoken of in 1 Cor 5:9, or may begin at 6:3. These vss are completely out of context, perhaps not even written by Paul. In contrast to what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:5-7, 12-18, 27-28, 36 where he condones social intercourse with unbelievers and between a believing spouse and an unbelieving spouse. /// In 6:16b, he modifies Leviticus 26:11-12 from God “dwelling in their midst,” to “living in them.” Beliar or (Belial) is a Hebrew word meaning “worthlessness.”
- 19) 9:3 -- Probably Corinthian Christians helping to establish a church in Macedonia, known to them but never named except for Titus.
- 20) **Chapters 10-13** may be the “severe letter” carried by Titus to Corinth. (See footnote #1 above,) But Paul Sampley doesn’t think so. Chapters 10-13 are clearly not part of the letter 1-9. Subsequent to Paul’s time, someone edited out the conclusion to 1-9 and added 10-13. Sampley says the reader of 10-13 must remember that 1) Paul is distressed that some of the Corinthians have turned against him due to pressure from unknown outsiders, and 2) he is anticipating a showdown visit. /// Paul offers them a choice: he can come with meekness and gentleness, or as a skilled warrior armed with God’s power.
- 21) 10:3-6 – “We may look like everyone else, and live like everyone else, but when we engage in

battle, God's power is at our beck and call." (Sampley's paraphrase). /// Paul takes his cue from the Roman way of keeping the peace: crush all opposition. God is a peace-loving God and maintains peace by crushing/shattering "Satan under your feet" (Romans 16:20).

- 22) 10:9-11. A Socratic irony: Paul may have had recurrent malaria or epilepsy but he was a strong man and a powerful speaker. See Acts 14:12.
- 23) 11:1-3 – Christ as bridegroom, the Corinthian church as virgin bride (cf. Ephesians 5:23, Revelation 19:7). V. 3 – A Jewish legend at the time: Satan seduced Eve and Cain was the result of the union.
- 24) 11:9 – Possibly, but probably not, from the original twelve.
- 25) 11:16-21 -- Paul ironically credits to his weakness the failure to enslave the Corinthians as he suggests the intruders have done. The "fools" in vs 19 are the intruders, according to Sampley, but others believe that they were probably the Judaizing rabbis insisting on circumcision, etc., and demanding money for teaching.
- 26) 11:22-28 – Paul is drawn into the very comparisons that he opposed so strongly in 10:12, primarily because outsiders have encroached on Paul's territory. /// vs. 24: the lashing by the synagogue-based Jews was restricted to 40 as decreed in Deuteronomy 25:3 /// Paul emphasizes his weakness to show that it is **God's** power that allows Paul to continue his mission in the face of all he has suffered.
- 27) 11:32 – In Acts 9:23. Luke says that it was the Jews who plotted to kill him.
- 28) 12:2 – The "someone" is no doubt Paul; he doesn't want to sound too boastful. According to Sampley's chronology, this vision was not the Damascus road vision, but occurred some seven years later when Paul was in Syria or Cilicia, and after the two-week Jerusalem visit with Peter and James. /// Many ancients believed in seven heavens. Some believed that God was enthroned above the 7th. Others believed that paradise was in the south side of the third heaven, Hell on the north side. (See Deut 10:14, 1 Kings 8:27, Ps 148:4, Luke 21:26, Ephesians 4:10, Colossians 1:16, 20, 2Peter 3:5,7,10). /// Muslim tradition (not found in the Koran) is that Mohammed flew at night from the Ka'bah in Mecca to the Temple in Jerusalem on the back of the horse Borak. There he climbed a ladder from heaven to heaven, meeting a major prophet at each level, finally greeting God in the 7th heaven. Some Muslims believe this actually happened; most believe that it was a vision.
- 29) 12:7-10. Barclay: The thorn in the flesh was 1) spiritual temptations (Calvin), 2) opposition and persecution (Luther), 3) carnal temptations (Catholics). None of these can be right. The word **skolops** can mean thorn but more likely means **stake**, like the one used to impale criminals. So the stake Paul felt was a physical pain: 1) his appearance, 2) epilepsy, 3) prostrating headaches of the migraine type, 4) eye trouble (see Acts 9:9, Gal 4:15, Gal 6:11), or 5) recurrent virulent malaria with severe headaches and fever. Barclay favors #5. /// Murphy-O'Connor: three possible categories -- **1) psychic** -- a real demon who accompanied Paul on his heavenly journey: sexual temptation, and/or hysteria, and/or depression. **2) physical** -- epilepsy (Gal 4:15, road to Damascus experience), speech defect (Gal 4:13ff), poor eyesight (Gal 4:15), spoke badly (2 Cor 10:10, 11:6), malaria, headache, earache. **3) none of the above** -- Most likely it was opposition to his ministry. "Messengers of Satan" implies an external personal source. In the OT, "thorns" are a metaphor for Israel's enemies. The thorn is the fact that none of his churches lived up to his expectations. "The thorn reminds him that he has none of those qualities which the world considered essential prerequisites for the success of his mission." /// Sampley: "Truth be told, we do not have a clue. Nor can we. Nor need we. *What* the problem is – that is not a concern for Paul." But

definitely not a confession of a sinful life; such a self-disclosure would not serve his purposes here. /// Did Paul misquote Joshua 23:13, where Joshua says to the Israelites that if they don't follow Moses' laws, God will "not continue to drive out these nations before you, but they shall be...a scourge on your sides and thorns in your eyes...?"

- 30) 12:12 – Nowhere in Paul's letters does he describe his signs and "mighty works." He doesn't need to: they've been seen by his addressees. Luke in Acts does describe some of them.
- 31) 12:21--The Greek word here is "aselgeia," means wanton insolence, lack of decency.
- 32) 13:5 – Here Paul turns the tables on those who have doubted his authority as an apostle of Christ: he asks if "Christ is in/among you."