Paul’s Paradigm for Ministry in 2 Corinthians:

Christ’s Death and Resurrection

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BTheol(Hons)
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This thesis is presented for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy – Theology

of Murdoch University
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

..............................

Evelyn Alice Ashley
Abstract

The Christian congregation in Corinth found Paul’s “weak” presentation of the gospel and his approach to ministry to be scandalous. Recently arrived “apostles” reinforced and accentuated attitudes the congregation had already imbibed from contemporary Corinthian culture. As a result many in the congregation were less than satisfied with Paul’s manner of speech, his apparent lack of “charismatic” qualities, his refusal to accept money from them, his lack of commendatory letters, and his lifestyle that was characterised by suffering, affliction, opposition and weakness.

However, Paul’s criteria for evaluating ministry, and by implication God’s criteria, were significantly different from those of the Corinthian congregation. Key verses such as 2 Cor 1:9; 3:5; 4:7; 6:7; 12:9 and 13:4 indicate that Paul maintained that Christian life and ministry generally, and apostolic ministry in particular, must be carried out through divine power, not human power. His apostolic ministry was valid because it was exercised as God’s representative, in God’s presence (2:17), with God as judge (5:10) and as a result of God’s mercy (4:1), not as a result of his own power, authority, eloquence or charismatic presence.

The theological underpinning for Paul’s approach to ministry is found in 13:4 where Christ who “was crucified as a result of weakness, but lives as a result of God’s power” is the model for Paul who “shares in his weakness”, but in ministry to the Corinthians, also “lives as a result of God’s power”. Paul’s model for ministry was
one of dependence on God. This is most clearly demonstrated in the “affliction” he experienced in Asia where he despaired of life itself, but in the process learned to rely on “God who raises the dead”. Thus his suffering, weakness and affliction, far from being disqualifiers for ministry, were in fact, demonstrations of his authenticity as a minister whose competency came from God and not from himself (3:6).
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Acknowledgements

This work could not have been produced without the support, encouragement and assistance of a number of people. While it is only fitting that thanks be formally expressed here, it is not possible to fully express the depth of my appreciation.

Firstly, I own a debt of gratitude to Dr Richard Moore whose assistance and support went beyond what was required for a supervisor. I have greatly appreciated the discussions, advice and encouragement, without which completing this thesis simply would not have been possible.

I am also indebted to my family. A special thank you to my husband, Chris, for his support and encouragement. Without his “You can do it!” and “You have to do this!” I am not sure the task would have been completed. Thank you, too, to my children for putting up with me throughout this process, especially for putting up with the frequent reply “I don’t know” to the question, “What’s for dinner?” I have also greatly appreciated my family’s role in keeping my computer systems running.

There are two pastors, Pastor Ray Brown and Pastor Garth Wootton, who have had a significant impact both on my life and on this work. I have appreciated the stimulating discussions and provocative questions, many of which have impacted the way I wrestled with the biblical passages. Thank you.
A thank you is also due to the leadership team and congregation of Bellevue Baptist Church, for it is together that we have taken some halting steps on the journey of learning what it means to rely on God and not on ourselves in ministry. And thank you to the Baptist Theological College staff and students who have provided a supportive and stimulating working environment in which to consider the implications of this study.

Above all, praise and glory are due to God. With Paul, I have learned, albeit in a limited way, that in my weaknesses God can be trusted. For it is in the midst of those weaknesses that it is possible for Christian ministry be conducted as a result of God’s power rather than as a result of human resources.

**Bible References**

The English text of 1 and 2 Corinthians is my own translation unless otherwise stated.

The English text of other Biblical references is from the *New Revised Standard Version* unless otherwise stated. The Greek text is from Nestlé-Aland 27th edition unless otherwise stated. BibleWorks 5.0 and BibleWorks 6.0 have been used to provide electronic versions of the text of the Greek New Testament, the Septuagint and the Masoretic Text. BibleWorks fonts have been used for Greek and Hebrew texts throughout.
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Codex Sinaiticus</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>Codex Alexandrinus</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>Codex Vaticanus</td>
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<td>BCE</td>
<td>Before Common Era</td>
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<td>CE</td>
<td>Common Era</td>
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<td>CEV</td>
<td>Contemporary English Version</td>
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<td>CNTC</td>
<td>Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>Codex 06 (D&lt;sup&gt;P&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESV</td>
<td>English Standard Version</td>
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<tr>
<td>ET</td>
<td>English Translation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ExpT</td>
<td><em>Expository Times</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>SBL</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature</td>
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<td>JSNT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</td>
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<td>JSOT</td>
<td>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</td>
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<td>KJV</td>
<td>King James Version</td>
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<td>LXX</td>
<td>Septuagint</td>
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<td>NAB</td>
<td>New American Bible</td>
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<td>NBG</td>
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<td>NET</td>
<td>New English Translation</td>
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<td>NIBC</td>
<td>New International Biblical Commentary</td>
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<td>NIV</td>
<td>New International Version</td>
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<tr>
<td>NKJV</td>
<td>New King James Version</td>
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<tr>
<td>NLT</td>
<td>New Living Translation</td>
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<td>NRSV</td>
<td>New Revised Standard Version</td>
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<td>NT</td>
<td>New Testament</td>
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<td>OT</td>
<td>Old Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Papyrus</td>
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<tr>
<td>REB</td>
<td>Revised English Bible</td>
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<td>RSV</td>
<td>Revised Standard Version</td>
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<tr>
<td>SNTS</td>
<td>Society for New Testament Studies</td>
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<td>TNIV</td>
<td>Today’s New International Version</td>
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Chapter 1

Introduction

It is popular today to talk about leadership in churches, to encourage church leadership teams, and in particular, senior pastors, to determine what their strengths are and then build on these strengths. There is a large focus on “strong leadership”, and the CEO model of leadership is becoming a dominant one in many churches. However, Jesus said, “You are not to lead as the world leads. Those who would be great must be the servant of all” (Matt 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45; cf. Luke 22:24-27; Matt 23:11-12; Mark 9:33-37).

Can a model of “strong leadership” fit with Jesus’ model of “servant leadership”? How can we be true to a biblical model of leadership in the twenty-first century? These are difficult and complex questions. The Corinthian correspondence is a good place to begin exploring a biblical model of leadership with the possibility of relevance for ministry today. Throughout the two extant letters of Paul to the Corinthian church, and particularly in 2 Corinthians, he repeatedly dealt with the issue of defending his apostleship, in essence, defending his leadership. Of all the congregations described in the NT, the one in Corinth is arguably the one that is closest to the twenty-first century church – at least the church in the West. Therefore, many of the issues the church in Corinth faced and the questions it asked are very similar to the issues faced and the questions asked by the church today.
At least some of the people in the congregation in Corinth – and it would appear to have been a significant number – were not satisfied with the way Paul demonstrated apostleship. He was too “weak” a leader for their liking. They would have preferred an apostle who was “strong”, and conveniently there were some newcomers who claimed to be apostles and whose model of leadership fitted better with the Corinthians’ culturally conditioned, pre-conceived ideas about leadership. And so criticism of Paul arose within the church. Among the criticisms were things such as:

“He is not an eloquent enough speaker.”

“His words in his letters are not congruent with the way he presents himself in person.”

“He is fickle and changes his mind regarding travel plans simply to make things easier for himself.”

“He doesn’t brag about ecstatic experiences, so he obviously doesn’t have any!”

“He clearly functions on a natural, human level, not on a spiritual level.”

“He refuses to accept our money. That must mean he doesn’t love us. And Jesus said a worker was worthy of their hire, so that must mean he is not worthy. He can’t be a genuine apostle!”

“He suffers all sorts of hardship and opposition. Surely that would not be the case if he was really an apostle of Jesus Christ!”

In a large portion of 2 Corinthians, and to some extent in 1 Corinthians as well, Paul addressed these issues. He defended his position as an apostle as someone appointed by God. But it was not only his position that he defended, but also the
way in which he carried out the ministry to which he had been appointed. However, as he engaged in this defence, the dominant theme was not that of power and control, but of weakness and dependence. It would seem that Paul had a very different model for leadership than that endorsed by many in the Corinthian congregation, and a very different model for leadership than is apparent in many churches today.

It is the purpose of this thesis to explore Paul’s paradigm for ministry, particularly as it is expressed in 2 Corinthians. It is proposed to examine key passages in 2 Corinthians with a view to distilling the essence of Paul’s paradigm for ministry. This will be followed by a brief survey of other NT writings to determine whether this paradigm is limited to 2 Corinthians or whether it is evident in other Pauline letters as well as whether it is limited to Paul or is expressed by other writers. It is also proposed to examine how this was worked out in practice in Paul’s day-to-day life and ministry, as well to explore some possibilities for how Paul’s paradigm might be applied in the twenty-first century.

**Motivation for this Study**

While *ex nihilo* may be an appropriate term to describe God’s creation of the world, it certainly does not apply to the production of a thesis. There are always ideas, books, situations, conversations, and so on, that stimulate the thinking in a particular direction long before a thesis takes shape. This thesis is no exception. There have been many influences and it is not possible to list them all. However,
it is appropriate to mention a few key influences, as these have been a significant part of shaping this work.

Firstly, personal experience in ministry has been a major factor. As a person who does not naturally fit society’s definition of a “strong leader”, the question that came to the fore was: “Is there room in ministry for someone who is ‘weak’?” In spite of what some recent literature on church leadership implies, Paul’s description of ministry in 2 Corinthians appeared to suggest that the answer is “Yes!” This required further exploration.

Another area in which personal experience influenced and acted as a catalyst for this work was the observation of what happens when church leaders find themselves under attack. From a human perspective, the most natural and most logical thing to do is to defend oneself aggressively. However, this does not always work, and even when it does, the outcome is often less than ideal. Coupled with this was the observation that in 2 Corinthians, the more Paul’s leadership was under attack, the more he talked about weakness. He took a “weak” approach to attack rather than a “strong” one. Perhaps there is something to be learned from his approach. As Paul concluded his defence of his ministry in 2 Corinthians, he gave what appeared to be a summary of his paradigm for ministry:

He [Christ] is not weak in his dealings with you, but is powerful among you, for indeed he was crucified as a result of weakness, but lives as a result of God’s power. So we also in our dealings with you, share in his weakness, but we will live with him as a result of God’s power (2 Cor 13:3b-4).
This raised the dual questions of how this was expressed in the day-to-day outworking of Paul’s ministry, and how this could be worked out in practical terms in ministry in the twenty-first century.

The second significant influence has been books. There are three, in particular, that have provided impetus. Firstly, Marva Dawn’s book, *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); secondly, Timothy Savage’s book, *Power Through Weakness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996); and thirdly, David Alan Black’s book, *Paul, Apostle of Weakness* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984). It is, perhaps, not a coincidence that each of these books has the word “weakness” in the title.

In her book, Marva Dawn challenges the church to consider how it has imbibed the world’s concept of power and success. Her answer is to draw the focus back to the cross. It is in the weakness of the cross that the way of life for the church is to be found:

> If we teach and demonstrate Christ’s cross thoroughly in our churches in all its ramifications of weakness, then we are more likely to form in members a way of life that operates out of weakness, and we are more likely to live with each other in suffering servanthood (Dawn, 2001, p 135).

Such a change in approach requires effort, but not simply more human effort to “do a better job”. Rather it is an engaging in battle in human weakness, and yet in divine power:

> [T]he battle requires our active engagement, but it is always God’s work through our weakness. … This is the major paradox of the Christian life: in our active weakness, God’s power is at work through us (Dawn, 2001, pp 131-132).

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What especially caught my attention in this book was the discussion of the difference in meaning between the Greek verbs τέλεω and τελειοω. The argument that τέλεω did not have the meaning “made perfect”, and thus the suggestion of an alternative translation and interpretation for 2 Cor 12:9, “My grace is sufficient for you; for power is brought to an end in weakness”, was one I had not encountered before. That human power was brought to its end in weakness, allowing Christ’s power to “tabernacle” upon a person, enabling ministry to be accomplished as a result of Christ’s power and not as a result of human resources, was intriguing and presented a whole new perspective on the concepts of weakness and power in ministry. The argument appeared to make sense, and yet no one else seemed to accept it. Again this was something that required further investigation.

Having read Marva Dawn’s book meant that I approached Timothy Savage’s book with a different perspective from that which I might otherwise have had. Savage (1996, p 187) describes his purpose as:

[T]o make sense of Paul’s paradoxical teaching in 2 Corinthians and in particular of his description of his ministry in terms of two seemingly contradictory, yet overlapping, experiences – of power manifested through weakness, of glory revealed in shame, of life working through death.

He tackles this with a dual approach: firstly by exploring the background to the situation in Corinth, and secondly by examining the paradoxes as they are presented in 2 Corinthians 3-4. In particular, I was struck by the way Savage dealt with 2 Cor 4:7. He translates the latter part of the verse as follows: “in order that the surpassing greatness of power may be of God and not of us” (1996, p 166). He does not include a phrase such as “to show that” indicating that the
power is inherently God’s, as is the case in a number of translations. Rather he keeps open the possibility that ministry could be attempted in human effort, arguing that it is in the context of weakness that this possibility is negated. His suggestion that perhaps “Paul means exactly what he says,” (1996, p 166) is reminiscent of Dawn’s suggestion with regard to 2 Cor 12:9. In comparing 2 Cor 4:7 with 2 Cor 12:9, Savage concludes that:

The very existence of Christ’s power in Paul was conditioned on the apostle’s prior humility and weakness. This would confirm the literal sense of 2 Corinthians 4:7, that it is only in Paul’s weakness that the power may be of God (1996, p 167, emphasis original).

This interpretation of 2 Cor 4:7 is congruent with the way Dawn interprets 2 Cor 12:9. Placed side by side, these two interpretations presented a different way of considering the relationship between weakness and power in ministry, and especially the relationship between human weakness and divine power. It also raised the question of whether the concept that weakness on the part of the minister might be the means, the catalyst, perhaps even the grounds, for ministry being conducted as a result of God’s power rather than as a result of human resources, was more widespread than these two verses. Was it, perhaps, an underlying principle of Paul’s ministry?

It was with these questions in mind, that I approached Black’s treatment of “weakness” in the Pauline literature. He focuses on the word ἀθέτευσεν and its cognates, systematically examining each occurrence of this word group in Paul’s literature. He concludes that Paul did not have a systematic theology of weakness as such, but that from the large number of uses of “weakness” words, a fairly clear picture of his understanding can be gained. Black (1984a, p 228; 1984b, pp 81-82) discerns three basic sub-themes: anthropological, Christological and
ethical. The anthropological sub-theme presupposes humanity’s limitations and
dependence on God. In his opinion it is related to “weakness of the flesh” but is
not the same as sinfulness; it includes sickness and suffering, but is not the same
as the common Greek understanding of the body as evil (Black, 1984a,
pp 228-234; 1984b pp 82-86). The second sub-theme, the Christological, is an
outgrowth of the first sub-theme and sees human weakness as the platform from
which God’s power is exhibited. It is intimately related to the death and
resurrection of Jesus, and it is in union with Christ that the believer shares in the
experience of both weakness and power (Black, 1984a, pp 234-240; 1984b,
pp 86-89). The third sub-theme, the ethical aspect of weakness, focuses on Paul’s
teaching about relationships between “weak” and “strong” believers and is the
consequence of reciprocal mutual love between believers (Black, 1984,
pp 240-246; 1984b. pp 89-92). It is the second sub-theme, the Christological
aspect of weakness, that is most closely related to the concepts highlighted by
both Dawn and Savage. While Black works with the traditional translation of 2
Cor 12:9, he comes to a conclusion that is not dissimilar from that of either Dawn
or Savage. He makes the following statements:

In the final analysis, by virtue of the Christian’s intimate, redemptive
fellowship with Christ, weakness is never merely human weakness but an
opportunity to manifest God’s power (1984a, p 245)

and,

God’s means of working, rightly understood, is not by making us stronger,
but by making us weaker and weaker until divine power alone is clearly
manifested (1984a, pp 246-247).

Again the possibility of weakness being the necessary grounds for the
manifestation of divine power in Christian life and ministry is broached. The
possibility that it is only in the experience of weakness that dependence on God
can be learned, was a notion that certainly required further exploration and thought.

Questions raised by my own experience in ministry led to my choice of books to read. In turn, this reading led to another series of questions. The purpose of this study is to look for some answers to these questions in Paul’s defence of his apostolic ministry as it is presented in 2 Corinthians.

**Approach of this Study**

While the three books mentioned above have had a significant impact on the formation of this thesis, it is proposed that this present study will have a focus that is different from each of them. Dawn explored the functioning of “the powers”, a concept that is outside the scope of this work. She also drew on a wide range of Scripture passages; here it is proposed to focus predominantly on 2 Corinthians. The scope here is narrower than that of Dawn; it is only the concept of the role of weakness in developing dependence on God, that will be picked up. But the scope will, at least in one sense, be wider than that of Savage in that it will focus on the whole of 2 Corinthians rather than just on chapters 3-4. Neither will it focus as much on the background issues, nor as much on the glory/shame paradox. Similarly, it is proposed that this work will have both a wider and a narrower scope than that of Black: narrower, in the sense that it will principally focus on 2 Corinthians rather than the whole of the Pauline literature; and wider in the sense that the examination of “weakness” will not be limited to ἀθενεία and its cognates, but will also explore other expressions of the concept.
The first step in this process is to summarise what is known of the city of Corinth, the Christian congregation in Corinth, and Paul’s relationship with that congregation. The cultural aspects that impacted the functioning of the church and its relationship, especially its difficulties, with Paul will be the main focus. Issues of the chronology of Paul’s interaction with the church and the order and integrity of his letters to them, will also be addressed. This is the necessary background against which Paul’s paradigm for ministry can be examined. Footnotes point to sources which discuss the background issues of the city of Corinth and the Christian congregation in the city in more detail.

As it appears that Paul presented his paradigm for ministry in a more explicit way as he concluded 2 Corinthians, the final section of 2 Corinthians, namely, chapters 10-13, will be examined before the rest of 2 Corinthians. In particular, Paul’s paradigm for ministry as expressed in 2 Cor 13:3b-4 will be compared with that of the Corinthian church and that of the newcomers whose leadership style the church admired and valued. Then 2 Cor 12:9 will be examined to explore whether the translation, “My grace is sufficient for you; for power is brought to an end in weakness”, is a viable one.

Having examined 2 Corinthians 10-13, then we will examine 2 Corinthians 1-9 to determine whether the conclusions drawn from chapters 10-13 also apply to the earlier part of the letter. Key passages such as 1:8-11; 2:14-3:6; 4:7-12 and 6:2-10, will be examined in more detail than the rest of this section. There will be a particular emphasis on key phrases and verses such as:
• “So that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead” (1:9);
• “But thanks be to God, who always leads us as prisoners in Christ’s procession, and makes known through us the aroma of the knowledge of him in every place” (2:14);
• “Not that we are competent of ourselves to consider anything as coming from us; our competency is from God” (3:5);
• “We have this treasure in clay jars so that the extraordinary power might be of God and not originate with us” (4:7);
• “For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh” (4:11); and
• “In the Holy Spirit … in God’s power” (6:6b-7a).

It is not the purpose of this study to provide a commentary on 2 Corinthians but simply to explore one topic in the letter. Therefore there will be a number of important exegetical questions that either will not be addressed or will be dealt with only briefly, with footnotes pointing to where more extended treatments can be found.

When some conclusions have been drawn about what Paul’s paradigm for ministry might have been and how that was worked out in practical terms in his ministry as presented in 2 Corinthians, there will be a brief survey of other passages of Scripture, beginning with 1 Corinthians, moving to other Pauline letters, and concluding with some of Jesus’ sayings as recorded in the Gospels. The purpose will be to ascertain whether this paradigm is limited to 2 Corinthians or whether it is more widespread.
One of the questions that formed the motivation for this study was how Paul’s paradigm for ministry might be applied today. There will, therefore, be an examination of this question. However, it will of necessity be only brief, raising, perhaps, more questions than it provides answers, for this is not an area in which a simple “quick-fix” answer will suffice. But it is hoped that this study will at least provide some pointers for wrestling with these issues in the practical reality of ministry in the twenty-first century.
Chapter 2

Background to 2 Corinthians

Introduction

Before we examine Paul’s paradigm for ministry as it is expressed in 2 Corinthians, it is necessary to examine the background to the letter which has come down to us with the label “2 Corinthians”. Background issues include the history and character of Corinth and the congregation at Corinth, the history of Paul’s relationship with that congregation, and how this letter fits within that history.

The City of Corinth

Corinth in the first century CE was both an ancient city and a relatively new city.¹ The ancient Greek city of Corinth was destroyed in 146 BCE by the Romans. A century later, and shortly before his death in 44 BCE, Julius Caesar ordered the reconstruction of the city as a Roman colony. Thus, the new city was built with Roman architecture and had a Roman form of government. Unlike a number of other Roman colonies, rebuilt Corinth was not settled with army veterans, but predominantly with poorer people, many of whom were freed slaves. They were a diverse group of people, mostly with ethnic roots in the eastern Mediterranean.

¹ Murphy-O’Connor’s book *St. Paul’s Corinth* has a detailed discussion of the City of Corinth in Paul’s time. It focuses on the archaeological evidence and has extensive quotations from ancient authors. Barnett (1997, pp 1-9); Furnish (1984, pp 4-22) and Witherington (1995, pp 5-35) also describe the Roman city of Corinth, including maps and photographs, and discuss how the culture of the city might have impacted the church.
This meant that while Latin was the official language, Greek was the language commonly spoken by the people.

Almost another century passed before Paul arrived in Corinth with the gospel. By that time it had become a prosperous city and was an important trade, banking and financial centre. Its location gave it control over two ports, Lechaeum and Cenchreae, making it a major trade route between Italy and Asia. Unloading cargo from a large ship in one port, hauling it across the isthmus and loading it onto another ship in the other port, was preferable to making the dangerous sea voyage around the Peloponnesos. Smaller boats could be dragged across.

Corinth was known for its particular blend of bronze. Pliny the Elder commented that “Corinthian bronze is valued before silver and almost even before gold” (Murphy-O’Connor, 1983, p 86). Paul’s references to gongs and cymbals, and the illustration of seeing an image in a mirror, are better appreciated against a backdrop of the production of these items in the city.

Tourism was also an important industry with the biennial Isthmian Games second only to the Olympic Games. These games dated back to the sixth century BCE. After Corinth was destroyed in 146 BCE, control of the games moved to Sicyon, 10km away, but control was returned to Corinth some time between 7 BCE and 3 CE (Murphy-O’Connor, 1983, pp 14-15). Competitions included not only athletic events, but also oratory, drama and musical contests. Women were permitted to compete, not only in the more aesthetic events, but also in foot races and chariot races. One can only wonder what effect these games had on issues
relating to the role of women in the church at Corinth, and also how much they were the catalyst for Paul’s images of the Christian life as a race. As games were held in the spring of 49 CE and again in the spring of 51 CE (Murphy-O’Connor, 1983, p 16), as the most likely date for Gallio’s term of office is 51-52 CE (Murphy-O’Connor, 1983, p 149; cf. Acts 18:12), and as Paul stayed in Corinth for about eighteen months (Acts 18:11), it is quite possible that Paul was in Corinth during one games, or at least during the preparation for, or aftermath of, a games. These games and the large number of tents required to accommodate visitors, would have provided Paul with work in his trade as a tent-maker, which in turn must have provided opportunities for evangelism.

Due to Corinth’s diverse population and its location on a major trade route, religion was pluralistic. Archaeological evidence in the ruins of Corinth suggests that a large number of different deities were worshipped. Dominant was worship of the Greek gods with there being evidence of temples, shrines and statues of Apollo, Athena, Tyche, Aphrodite, Dionysos, Artemis, Cybelle, Poseidon, Asclepios, Demeter and Kore, Hera Argaea, Zeus, and others (Furnish, 1984, pp 15-18; Savage, 1996, 49-51; Witherington, 1995, pp 12-19). As a number of these gods were associated with fertility, it may provide some insight into why Paul needed to address the issue of sexual morality repeatedly in his letters. Religion was an integral part of life, with civil leaders frequently performing religious duties. However, the focus was primarily on gaining the favour of the gods for material gain and comfort. Doctrine was of secondary, and for many, little importance.
The Asclepion (Murphy-O’Connor, 1983, pp 161-167) was comprised not only of a temple, but also had dining rooms available for private functions. It is not certain whether these dining rooms were functioning during Paul’s time, but understanding the close connection between temples and social meals provides a better understanding of what faced the Christians with regard to meat offered to idols. Also found at the Asclepion were ex-votos representing various parts of the body, apparently offered in request or thanks to the god for healing. Whether these were a trigger for Paul’s image of the Church as a body is unclear, but they probably would have made the image more vivid for the Corinthians.

There is also evidence of the imperial cult, as well as Egyptian cults, particularly Isis, and Judaism (Furnish, 1984, p 19-22). The social, cultural, political, commercial, and medical realities of day-to-day life were closely associated with religious practices. With the exception of Judaism, “the emphasis in Corinth was on harmony, on making one’s religion compatible with the rest, not on exclusivity” (Savage, 1995, p 50). The implications for the Christian community are obvious.

The Roman city was relatively young, with no landed aristocracy. The descendants of freed slaves were now those with wealth and power. An “aristocracy of money” had developed (Hafemann, 2000, pp 23-24), resulting in class distinctions being based on wealth rather than on heritage.²

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² Jongkind (2001, pp 139-148) argues for a “middle class” who were not part of the elite, but did have sufficient wealth to afford some luxuries such as more spacious living quarters and the ability to travel. He suggests that the Corinthian correspondence indicates that there were people of this class in the church.
Patronage, as in the rest of the Greco-Roman world, was also a significant part of the culture. A patron could gain honour and prestige through aid given to clients. In return, the client could gain both material benefits and a passage to greater status. This is a relatively unfamiliar practice in twenty-first century Western culture, but perhaps the practice of corporate sponsorship of sporting teams is a parallel that can provide some insight into this practice which was such an integral part of first century life.

Many in Corinth had achieved wealth through hard work and were proud of their achievements. Materialism and boasting of one’s achievements were a way of life. As Savage (1996, p 41) sums it up:³

Putting oneself on show was not a ritual reserved for the elite. It was a passion played out at every level, though on lesser scales. In Corinth, perhaps more than anywhere else, social ascent was the goal, boasting and self-display the means, personal power and glory the reward.

An understanding of the importance of boasting in Corinthian culture, and the close link between wealth and status, sheds light on what Paul has to say about boasting, and the way he engages in “foolish boasting”. Likewise, the importance of patron-client relationships sheds light on the social situation in the church in Corinth, in particular, on some of the issues they were having with divisions.⁴ The inter-relationship between patronage and boasting, and how they fitted within the social context of the day,⁵ may help to explain the uneasiness between Paul

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³ Timothy Savage, in his book *Power through Weakness*, has an extensive discussion of the social situation in Corinth with particular reference to the role of boasting.
⁴ John Chow considers the issue of patronage at considerable length in his book *Patronage and Power* and seeks to demonstrate that social relationships defined by patronage go a long way to explaining the difficulties that Paul was addressing in the Corinthian Church, particularly in 1 Corinthians.
and the Corinthians with regard to Paul’s refusal to accept financial support from them.

**The Corinthian Correspondence**

The two canonical letters to the Corinthian Church are not the entire Corinthian correspondence. While they are all that has survived, they contain references to other correspondence that has not been preserved.

In 1 Cor 5:9 Paul indicated that he had written to the Corinthians previously, making 1 Corinthians at least the second letter. In 2 Cor 2:4 and 7:8 Paul referred to a letter that caused both him and the Corinthians grief. This description does not fit with the contents of 1 Corinthians, and while some see 2 Corinthians 10-13 as representing, or at least being a part of this letter, it is more likely that this was a letter that is no longer extant.

The correspondence, however, was not all one way. Paul began 1 Corinthians 7 with, “now concerning the matters about which you wrote”, clearly indicating that there had been at least one letter from the church at Corinth to Paul. There were also verbal reports to Paul regarding the situation in Corinth. At least some of what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians was in response to a report from Chloe’s people (1 Cor 1:11), Paul rejoiced at the coming of Stephanus, Fortunatus and Achaicus from Corinth (1 Cor 16:15-18), and he was encouraged by the news brought by Titus (2 Cor 7:6). From 1 Corinthians (4:17; 16:10) we learn that Paul sent Timothy to Corinth and called for the people to accept him, while in 2 Corinthians
(1:1, 19) he wrote as if Timothy was with him. Presumably Timothy had returned from Corinth with news of the church.

When the account of the founding of the church in Acts is used in conjunction with 1 Corinthians, it is possible to gain a picture of the early relationship between Paul and the church in Corinth. However, 2 Corinthians raises a number of questions that make it more difficult to gain a clear picture of the course of the later relationship between the two.

**Integrity of 2 Corinthians**

A key issue relates to whether 2 Corinthians, as it has been handed down to us, is one letter or a composite of two or more letters.\(^6\) There are apparent breaks in thought between 2:13 and 2:14, between 6:13 and 6:14, between 7:1 and 7:2 and between 7:4 and 7:5. There appear to be separate treatments of the collection in chapters 8 and 9, and chapters 10-13 have a distinct tone.

If each of these awkward transitions is regarded as marking out a separate letter, then 2 Corinthians may represent the compilation of a group of separate letters or fragments of letters, not necessarily in chronological order.\(^7\) This view, in a variety of forms, is taken by a number of scholars.

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\(^6\) For a detailed discussion of the arguments for and against the various views see Furnish (1984, pp 29-48); Harris (2005, pp 8-51); Martin (1986, pp xl-lii) and Thrall (1994, pp3-49).

\(^7\) Partition theories originated with J.S. Semler (1776); J. Weiss discerned six separate letters; and Bornkamm, Georgi, Marxsen all discern four or more letters (cited in Harris, 2005, pp 9-11; Thrall, 1994, pp 3,47-48). Hamel (1904) argued for three letters that significantly rearranged 2 Corinthians, with Goguel (1926), Preisker (1926), Dean (1947) and Weiss (1959) suggesting various partition theories (cited in Furnish, 1984, pp 32-33). Smithals (1984) identifies no less than thirteen pieces of correspondence between Paul and the Corinthian church, with seven being represented in 2 Corinthians (cited in Harris, 2005, p 10). Frank Hughes (1997, pp 336-350) concludes that rhetorical criticism supports Bornkamm’s partition theory.
However, the predominant view, with some variations, is that chapters 1-9 represent a separate letter from chapters 10-13. The main argument in favour of this view is that the sudden change in attitude and approach between the end of chapter 9 and the beginning of chapter 10 is distinct enough to require two separate letters. Additionally, it is argued that (a) such a change in tone would jeopardise the reconciliation evident in chapters 1-9; (b) the imminent visit promised in 12:4 and 13:1 is not indicated in chapters 1-9; and (c) the first person singular dominates chapters 10-13, while the first person plural dominates chapters 1-9.\(^8\)

The majority of those who argue that 2 Corinthians is comprised of two letters see chapters 10-13 as being written later than chapters 1-9.\(^9\) It is usually argued that Paul received additional information that alerted him to an escalation of the situation in Corinth, and chapters 10-13 form a response to this new information. The time frame is thought to be short, but it is also believed that chapters 1-9 had already been dispatched, otherwise Paul would not have sent them, but rather replaced them with this new letter.

Some of those who argue for two separate letters see chapters 10-13 as part of the “tearful” letter and written prior to chapters 1-9.\(^10\) The greatest difficulty with this

\(^8\) Harris (2005, pp 29-33) provides a detailed discussion of the issues including counter-arguments.

\(^9\) For a detailed argument in favour of this view see Furnish (1984, pp 30-48). Others in favour of this view include Barrett (1973, pp 5-21); Martin (1986, pp xlii); Murphy-O’Connor (1991, pp 10-12) and Nigel Watson (1993, pp xix-xxix).

\(^10\) Francis Watson (1984, pp 324-346) argues strongly for this view, citing others such as J.H. Kennedy and A. Plummer who also hold this view. However, Watson’s method of arguing is slightly different from theirs. Murphy-O’Connor (1991, pp 31-43) responds to Watson’s arguments in detail and concludes that “Watson’s arguments have once again failed to carry conviction” (p 43).
view is that the specific issue addressed in the “tearful letter”, particularly the person who had offended (2 Cor 2:5-8), is not mentioned in chapters 10-13. Also the issue of the “false apostles”, which is so dominant in 10-13, is not mentioned when Paul refers back to the “tearful letter”.

One variation on the view that 2 Corinthians represents two distinct letters is the view that chapters 8 and 9 are parallel accounts and thus one or the other, or both, represent separate letters. Another variation is the view that 6:14-7:1 is an interpolation, either from a separate Pauline letter or from a non-Pauline source. It is argued that the large number of non-Pauline words and the sudden change in topic suggest that this is from a non-Pauline source. Some argue that the subject matter lends itself to an identification of these verses with the “previous letter” (1 Cor 7:1). Alternatively, close verbal links with 7:5-16 and Paul’s propensity for taking detours in his argument are understood by others to support the inclusion of these verses as an original part of this current letter, though with the possibility that Paul is quoting from somewhere else.

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13 Harris (2005, p 25) concludes that “notwithstanding the prima facie non-Pauline features of the paragraph, its incontestable Pauline characteristics and the very presence of the paragraph in a genuine Pauline letter and in such an expected place suggest that it stems in toto from Paul’s own hand”.

There are also scholars who argue for the unity of 2 Corinthians. It is argued that the “difficult transitions” are not as “difficult” as some suggest, and can be explained by such things as the letter not being written in one sitting, Paul addressing different issues in different sections of the letter, or the possibility of additional information arriving during the writing process. The main argument in favour of the unity of 2 Corinthians is that there is no manuscript evidence of it in any form other than that which has been handed down to us. Additionally, many of the themes that are evident in chapters 1-9, and particularly in chapters 1-7, are also evident in chapters 10-13.

Counter to this is the fact that the First Epistle of Clement, written in the last decade of the first century, makes explicit reference to 1 Corinthians, but not to 2 Corinthians, even though 2 Corinthians would have well suited the situation. This is taken as evidence that 2 Corinthians was probably circulated significantly later than 1 Corinthians. Thus any compilation of two or more letters may have been undertaken prior to its circulation. However, if chapters 1-9 form one letter and chapters 10-13 form another written shortly afterwards, the ending of the first letter and the beginning of the second must have been omitted in the merging. This is possible, but there is no manuscript evidence to support the theory. Harder

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15 Examples include: (a) visiting and sparing/not sparing the Corinthians (1:23; 13:2), (b) the obedience of the Corinthians (2:9; 10:6); (c) the issue of commendation (3:1; 4:2; 5:12; 6:4; 10:12, 18; 12:11); (d) Satan’s role in blinding so they cannot see the light of the gospel (4:4) and masquerading as an angel of light (11:14); (d) opponents who proclaimed the gospel for profit (2:16-17; 11:21); (e) in contrast Paul has not taken advantage of anyone (7:2; 12:14-18); (f) “hardship” lists (4:8-9; 6:4-10; 11:22-29; 12:10); (g) Paul renounced falsifying God’s word (4:2) but accused his opponents of proclaiming “another gospel” (11:4); and (h) the issue of functioning “according to human standards” (1:17; 10:2-3).
to answer is the question of why the letters may have been merged, particularly if the view is taken that more than two letters are represented by 2 Corinthians.

The wide variety of views demonstrates the uncertain nature of the data and thus the difficulty in drawing a conclusion on this matter. What is agreed is that chapters 10-13 are a distinct section, and that 2:14-7:4 (with or without 6:14-7:1) also form a distinct section. Each of these sections, then, can be treated as a coherent whole in its own right, regardless of which view is taken of the integrity of 2 Corinthians. However, the position taken in this study is that chapters 1-9 precede chapters 10-13 and that 2 Corinthians possibly forms two letters written within a short space of time, but perhaps more likely, is one letter that has been written over a period of time. Whether chapters 10-13 are a separate section of the same letter, or possibly a separate letter, it seems likely that Paul received additional information regarding the changing situation in Corinth between the writing of chapters 9 and 10. As such, chapters 10-13 form Paul’s response to an escalation in opposition in Corinth, but an opposition that was, nonetheless, already in existence.

While the integrity of 1 Corinthians is occasionally challenged, the majority of New Testament scholars treat it as one letter. In this study the integrity of 1 Corinthians will be assumed. Thus 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 2 Corinthians 10-13 will each be treated as separate but internally coherent documents, or sections of documents, representing various stages in the relationship between Paul and the Church in Corinth.

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16 This is the view taken by Furnish (1984, p 454), and with slight modification by Thrall (2000, p 595).
17 This is the view held by Barnett (1997, p 450), and Harris (2005, p 661).
Chronology of Paul’s Interaction with the Church in Corinth

Arising from the issue of the integrity of 2 Corinthians is the issue of the chronology of Paul’s interaction with the Church in Corinth. If the conclusions above concerning the integrity of both 1 and 2 Corinthians, but in particular of 2 Corinthians, are correct, then a likely chronology of events is as follows.

- Paul arrived in Corinth, worked as a tentmaker with Priscilla and Aquila.
  Along with Silas and Timothy, he founded the Church in Corinth (Acts 18).
- Paul stayed in Corinth for 18 months, but after being brought before proconsul Gallio, he and Priscilla and Aquila left.
- Paul wrote a letter (Letter A – lost) to the Corinthians (1Cor 5:9).
- The Corinthians wrote a letter (lost) to Paul (1 Cor 7:1), possibly delivered by Stephanus, Fortunatus and Achaicus (1 Cor 16:15-18).
- Members of Chloe’s household gave Paul a verbal report (1 Cor 1:11).
- Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (Letter B) from Ephesus (1 Cor 16:8).
- Paul sent Timothy to Corinth, probably via the overland route, apparently expecting 1 Corinthians to arrive before Timothy did (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10; Acts 19:22).
- Timothy returned from Corinth and reported to Paul.
- Paul made a second “painful” visit to Corinth and returned to Ephesus (2 Cor 2:1).
- Paul modified his previous travel plans and wrote a “tearful letter” (Letter C – lost) instead of visiting (1 Cor 16:5-6; 2 Cor 1:15-2:4, 7:8).
- Titus visited Corinth.
• Paul went to Troas; when Titus did not arrive, he went on to Macedonia.
  (2 Cor 2:12-13).
• Titus arrived from Corinth with encouraging news (2 Cor 7:5-16).
• Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 1-9 (Letter D), possibly carried to Corinth by Titus
  and colleagues (2 Cor 8:17-18, 12:18).
• Paul received news of the deteriorating situation in Corinth and wrote 2 Cor
  10-13, which was sent either with chapters 1-9 (as a part of Letter D), or
  perhaps shortly afterwards as another letter (Letter E).
• Paul’s planned third visit to Corinth (2 Cor 12:14, 13:1) is likely to have
  occurred (Acts 20:1-3) with Romans probably written from Corinth.

**Paul’s Opponents in Corinth**

The two extant letters from Paul to the church in Corinth provide evidence that
there were those in Corinth who opposed Paul in a variety of ways. There has
been much discussion as to who these opponents in Corinth might have been,
without significant agreement. In 1 Corinthians Paul dealt with situations that
had arisen within the church. Those who held a differing view from Paul, and
those whom Paul endeavoured to correct, were members of the congregation. But
the issue is not so clear-cut in 2 Corinthians.

In 2 Corinthians 1-9 Paul was again dealing with issues that had arisen within the
church. There were clearly those who questioned Paul’s integrity, and possibly
even questioned his status as an apostle, and while there does appear to be an

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18 For a history of the research on this topic and an explanation of the various views see Barnett,
(1997, pp 33-40); Barrett (1973, pp 28-32; 1971, pp 233-254); Furnish (1984, pp 48-54); and
Harris (2005, pp 67-87).
escalating of the differences between Paul and some of the members of the church, the protagonists still appear to be members of the congregation in Corinth. However, it is possible, perhaps even probable, that there were already newcomers among the congregation (cf. 2:17; 3:1; 5:12), but that their influence had not yet become critical.

But by the time 2 Corinthians 10-13 was written there was a significant change in the situation. While Paul continued to call for unity and for a renunciation of immorality within the congregation (12:20-21), he addressed more specifically the issue of a group of people who had come into the church from outside, who were posing as apostles, and were causing problems for the congregation.

There are hints in 2 Corinthians 1-9 that they were already present, but it is not until chapters 10-13 that Paul dealt specifically with the results of their presence. He used a number of descriptive words and phrases: “super-apostles” (11:5, 12:11), “false apostles, deceitful workers” (11:13), “ministers of Satan” disguised as “ministers of righteousness” and “apostles of Christ” (11: 13-15), but there is no unambiguous description of who these people were or what they taught. Clearly, the church knew to whom Paul was referring, but he did not address them directly or even name them, so who they were and what they taught must be deduced from the accusations made against Paul and the way he responded to those accusations.

The most common view is that Paul’s opponents in Corinth were Judaisers, although there are numerous variations within this basic view. Some see the
opponents as identical to those with whom Paul deals elsewhere, such as in his letter to the Galatians. However, the lack of any mention of the Law or circumcision in the letters to the Corinthians, throws doubt on this. Others understand them to be merely advocating the keeping of the Law by Jews, and not also by Gentiles.

The fact that Paul asks “Are they ministers of Christ?” and answers, “I am a better one!” implies that they are indeed ministers of Christ, and causes a number of commentators to argue that there are two distinct groups: the “super-apostles”, “ministers of Christ”, frequently identified as being the “Jerusalem Apostles”; and the “false apostles”, “ministers of Satan” who are the ones actually causing the problems in Corinth. There are strong arguments in favour of each view, and neither view is without problems. However, the evidence appears to favour understanding the terms “super-apostles” and “false apostles” as referring to the same group of people, the group that was causing the Corinthians to doubt Paul. This is the way the terms will be interpreted in this work. However, it would not make a significant difference to the way Paul’s paradigm for ministry is understood, if “super-apostles” and “false apostles” were interpreted as two distinct groups.

The preoccupation of the Corinthian church with “wisdom”, “knowledge” and “mysteries” has led some to conclude that the opponents were Gnostics, or at least proto-gnostics. But the topic of what makes a person “spiritual” is also a

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20 E.g. 1 Cor 1-2; 8; 12-14.
dominant one. This, coupled with Paul’s need to “boast about visions” (2 Cor 12:1), suggests that the opponents may have been “pneumatics”. Some have concluded that they were a particular type of “holy men”.

Another possibility is that the intruders had come under strong Hellenistic influences. The high value put on eloquence, and the impact of social conventions such as patronage, boasting and letters of commendation within Corinth, may have made the congregation susceptible to itinerant teachers whose teaching and manner of life fitted with these conventions more easily than did Paul’s teaching and lifestyle.

The question still remains as to what can be ascertained about these intruders into the congregation in Corinth. If evidence is limited to what is stated in 2 Corinthians, then the following can be deduced. They were Jewish (11:22). Their influence in Corinth seems to have trespassed on Paul’s sphere of ministry (10:13-14), possibly in contravention of the agreement outlined in Galatians 2:7-10. They commended themselves (10:12), and if it is conceded that they were already present in Corinth at the time of writing chapters 1-9, they may have had letters of commendation from elsewhere (3:1). In contrast to Paul, they seem to have accepted financial support (11:7-12; 12:13), possibly even demanded such support (11:19-20; cf. 2:17). The fact that Paul is forced to talk about his own visions (12:1) as well as “signs and wonders and mighty works” (12:12) suggests that visions and miracles were an important part of their repertoire. They were eloquent speakers, again in contrast to Paul who deliberately shunned the

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21 E.g. 1 Cor 1-4; 12-14.
rhetorical style expected by the Corinthians (1 Cor 2:1-5; 2 Cor 10:10; 11:6).
Given Paul’s response of “foolish boasting”, boasting about their status as apostles and all that went with that, seems to have been a significant part of the approach of these “false apostles”. Very little can be inferred about their actual teaching. Paul’s comments relate more to their methods and lifestyle than they do to the content of their teaching. However, the way they approached the role of an apostle meant that the net result was that they proclaimed a “different Jesus”, “another spirit” and “another gospel” (2 Cor 11:4).

One thing that is clear is that these newcomers were not the cause of the problems in Corinth. There were problems, including disagreements between Paul and at least some of the congregation, well before the arrival of these newcomers who claimed to be apostles. However, their presence did aggravate the situation and helped to escalate the conflict between Paul and the Corinthian church. It seems likely that they provided the church in Corinth with a model of apostleship that fitted better with their social and cultural pre-conceived ideas, and was thus more to their liking. They demonstrated an apostleship of wisdom, eloquence and power. In stark contrast, Paul’s model of apostleship – one of weakness, humility and dependence, based on the example of the crucified but risen Christ – cut across all their cultural expectations.

The Issues of Dispute Between the Corinthians and Paul

There were a number of key issues that caused friction between Paul and the Corinthian Church. While he challenged them on issues such as moral and ethical
behaviour, what it meant to be “spiritual”, and appropriate order in worship, it is the issues that the Corinthians had with Paul that caused the most conflict between the two.

The Corinthians had a number of questions relating to Paul’s integrity. One such question concerned the apparent discrepancy between Paul’s letters and his demeanour when he was present with them. The accusation was that “his letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible” (2 Cor 10:10). Paul assured them that when he did arrive, his actions would be consistent with what he had written (10:11; 13:1-2,10).

Another question relating to integrity arose from changes in Paul’s travel plans (1 Cor 16:5-9; 2 Cor 1:15-22; 2:1; 13:1). For some, this was evidence that Paul could not be trusted. Paul, however, maintained that the change in plans was to spare them further pain (2 Cor 1:23-2:4).

Finances, too, were a matter of contention (1 Cor 9:1-23; 2 Cor 11:7-11; 12:14-18). While Paul did accept financial support from other churches, he refused finance from Corinth. They interpreted this as evidence that he did not love them and treated them worse than he treated other churches. Paul, on the other hand, described it as a demonstration of parental love. A complicating factor was that at the same time Paul was refusing support for himself, he was asking the Corinthians to support the Christians in Jerusalem. There are hints that some may have seen this as a dishonest way for Paul to extract funds from them; that some of the funds were going to Paul, not to Jerusalem.
Paul’s methods and lifestyle were also a source of conflict between him and the Corinthian Church. The Church placed high value on letters of commendation, while Paul carried none, save the letter of commendation that they themselves constituted (2 Cor 3:1-3). They had a love of “wisdom” and a preoccupation with being “spiritual”, but the way Paul defined “wisdom” and “spiritual” contrasted starkly with their definitions. Instead of eloquent speech, Paul proclaimed “Christ crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). Boasting was a way of life in Corinth, but Paul insisted on “foolish boasting” and boasted of his weaknesses and hardships, not his great achievements (e.g. 2 Cor 11:21-29).

The combination of a lifestyle that the Corinthians found unpalatable, and questions regarding Paul’s integrity, in turn raised the question of whether Paul was a genuine apostle. This was particularly noticeable when some itinerant “apostles”, whose lifestyle and methods were diametrically opposed to Paul’s, arrived. With two divergent models of apostleship before them, the Corinthian Christians were forced to choose which of the two best demonstrated what it meant to be “an apostle of Jesus Christ”. They were inclined to choose the model presented by those who had recently arrived, over the model presented by Paul.

It is in this context that Paul talked about being weak. It is in the context of questions regarding the genuineness of his apostleship, that Paul talked most about boasting in his weakness so that the power of God might dwell in him (2 Cor 12:9b). And it is against this background that Paul provided the theological underpinning for his approach to ministry: “For indeed he [Christ] was
crucified as a result of weakness, but he lives as a result of God’s power. So we also, in our dealings with you, share in his weakness, but we will live with him as a result of God’s power” (2 Cor 13:4).

The “Thorn in the Flesh”

A key component in Paul’s discussion of “weakness”, and thus his paradigm for ministry, was what he termed a “thorn in the flesh” (12:7), as it was a concrete example of such weakness. He did not, however, give an explanation of what this “thorn” might have been. Numerous suggestions have been made.

The phrase itself is ambiguous. The word (σκόλοψ) usually translated as “thorn” can also be translated “stake”. It is unclear whether the dative should be rendered “in” or “for”. Additionally, “flesh” could simply refer to physical substance or it could carry the nuance that it does in a number of other places and be a reference to the sinful nature. Thus the phrase “a thorn/stake in/for the flesh/sinful nature” can have a variety of meanings depending on what decisions are made regarding each of these elements. The elaboration that follows (12:7b), “a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated”, also raises some questions, the answers to which affect the overall conclusion as to precisely what Paul was referring. For ease of discussion the commonly used translation, “thorn in the flesh” will be used, but the possible different interpretations need to be kept in mind.

22 For an extensive discussion of the various conclusions that have been drawn see Thrall (2000, pp 809-818). Furnish (1984, pp 547-550), Martin (1986, pp 411-416) and Barnett (1997, pp 568-571) also discuss the various views.
Conclusions regarding what this “thorn in the flesh” was basically fall into three categories: (1) it was some form of temptation; (2) it was some form of opposition or persecution; or (3) it was some form of physical ailment.

**Temptation**

This view sees the “flesh” as the human tendency to sin and thus the “thorn”, which is “for the flesh”, as some form of temptation, usually moral, and often sexual. It is probably due, at least to some extent, to the rendering in the Latin Vulgate *stimulus carnis* (“the thorn of the flesh) (Furnish, 1984, p 548; Lambrecht, 1999, p 205).

The major problem with this view is that the “thorn” was given by God in order to stop Paul from becoming proud. It does not seem to fit with God’s character that he would give a temptation to one type of sin (moral/sexual), in order to avoid falling into another type of sin (pride). Additionally, the giving of the “thorn” is closely related to the extraordinary revelation of fourteen years before. Temptation to sin, being part of human nature, is something that Paul would always have had to deal with, not something that would have started at a specific time. While this view gained some popularity in the past, particularly in the Middle Ages, few today hold it.

**Opposition or Persecution**

In favour of Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” being some form of opposition or persecution the following points can be made:
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<th>Positive Arguments</th>
<th>Counter Arguments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the LXX the word “thorn” (σκόλοψ) is used of Israel’s enemies: e.g. Num 33:55; Ezek 28:24.</td>
<td>However, it does not always refer to enemies: e.g. Hos 2:6; Sir 43:19.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A “messenger/angel of Satan” (ἅγγελος σατανᾶ) most naturally refers to a person or group of people and it parallels Paul’s previous mention of his opponents in Corinth as “ministers of Satan” (οἱ διάκονοι αὐτοῦ; 11:15).</td>
<td>But in 11:14-15, Satan is called the “angel” (αγγελος); those who serve him are called “ministers” (διάκονοι), not “angels/messengers” (αγγελοι).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The verb “to buffet” (κολαθίζω) is usually used of people. The only other time Paul used it is in a hardship list (1 Cor 4:11). It is also the word used of Jesus being beaten by the guards (Mark 14:65).</td>
<td>This does not, however, exclude a metaphorical meaning such as being buffeted by a physical ailment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The term “flesh” (σάρξ) is not necessarily restricted to the physical, and elsewhere in Paul it is often used to refer to the sinful nature.</td>
<td>But at times the meaning is restricted to the physical, and the image of a “thorn” is more easily related to the physical.</td>
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<tr>
<td>This statement is preceded (11:23-29) and followed (12:10) by a “hardship list”, which is a list of hardships and opposition that came from being an apostle of Christ.</td>
<td>How closely these are related to the specific affliction of the “thorn” is debateable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The verb “leave” (ἀφίημι, 12:8) is usually used of people so would be better translated “so that he might leave me”.</td>
<td>“So that it might leave me” is grammatically just as likely.</td>
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</tbody>
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When the “thorn in the flesh” is regarded as opposition from people, suggestions include the opponents in Corinth, the more ongoing opposition from Judaisers, or persecution generally. As the “thorn” was closely related to the revelation of fourteen years before and had been operative, at least intermittently, since then, it is unlikely to be the opposition in Corinth, which was much more recent. The ongoing opposition from Judaisers is more plausible, but again the beginning of it cannot clearly be dated to fourteen years earlier. Additionally, it is unclear that
the problem Paul addressed in Corinth was specifically concerned with Judaisers.
Persecution generally was not something that was specific to Paul, or even
specific to apostles; it was something that all Christians might face. And again it
cannot be linked with the specific vision mentioned, but was something that was
apparent from soon after Paul’s conversion.

While the argument for the “thorn in the flesh” being opposition or persecution
has some strong points in its favour, it is difficult to link it with any specific
persecution or date it precisely. When Paul talked of the “thorn” he did seem to
have something specific in mind and dated the beginning of it quite precisely.

**Physical Ailment**

In favour of Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” being some form of physical ailment, the
following points can be made:

<table>
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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The metaphor of a “thorn” most naturally describes a painful physical ailment, even more so if “stake” is the better translation.</td>
<td>But in the LXX it is used of people who are enemies.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satan could be the agent of physical illness or suffering (Luke 13:16; Job 1-2).</td>
<td>But could also be the agent of opposition.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul refers to a serious physical problem during his mission in Galatia (Gal 4:13-14).</td>
<td>There is no definite article attached to ἀθέτεψεν (Gal 4:13) and so there is no necessary reference to the specific problem Paul is now referring to (2 Cor 12:7-9).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An ongoing physical ailment would be contrary to the triumphalistic views of the Corinthians and so increase their poor view of Paul.</td>
<td>But so would the fact that his ministry met with opposition, especially from his own people.</td>
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The major difficulty with this view is that Paul must have been in generally good health to have undertaken the ministry and travel that he did, and to have survived the various hardships and persecutions. Counter to this is the possibility that whatever the physical ailment was, it may have been recurrent rather than constant. Its effects may have been severe from time to time, but with periods in between in which he was able to engage in vigorous activity.23

There have been numerous suggestions as to what, specifically, this physical ailment might have been. Suggestions include migraine, fever, epilepsy, failing eyesight, a speech impediment and malaria. A physical ailment could have had an onset at a specific time, such as fourteen years previously. A specific date of onset such as this would seem to exclude a congenital defect.

**Conclusion Regarding the “Thorn in the Flesh”**

From the context it is clear that whatever this “thorn” was, it was something that Paul felt was a hindrance to his ministry. He prayed three times that it be removed. But the reply he received from the Lord helped him to see it not as a hindrance, but as a means of keeping him dependent on the Lord. The link with

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23 Harris (2005, p 171) follows Alexander (1904) in suggesting a severe physical illness, with the three times Paul prayed that it be removed coinciding with three bouts of the illness; the first fourteen years previously on the occasion of the vision, the second when he first proclaimed the gospel in Galatia (Gal 4:13-14), and the third in Asia (2 Cor 1:8-9).
the vision also makes it clear that this “thorn” was something that began at that
time and had continued, at least intermittently, ever since.

Paul did not elaborate on what the “thorn” was, and this has led most
commentators to conclude that the Corinthians knew what Paul was talking about,
but as Barnett (1997, p 568) points out, this is not necessarily the case. He had
not previously talked about the vision, so he may not have previously talked about
the “thorn” either. He may have been deliberately vague because the specifics
were not relevant to the argument. Whether the Corinthians knew what it was or
not we certainly do not. We have to live with the uncertainty.

The argument in favour of it being some form of physical ailment appears to be
the strongest, but there is insufficient data to determine any specific ailment. This
view seems to fit best with the purpose of the “thorn” being to keep him from
becoming proud as a result of the extraordinary revelation that he had been
granted. This is a conclusion, however, that must be held tentatively, as the
argument that it was opposition from people has some strong points in its favour
and cannot be completely ruled out.

**Conclusion**

The character and history of the city of Corinth, the Christian community within
that city, and Paul’s relationship with the church, are the background against
which Paul’s letters must be interpreted. In particular, the contrast between the
values of the believers in Corinth and Paul’s values sets the scene for Paul to
expound his paradigm for Christian life and ministry. The Corinthians valued power, status, wisdom, wealth, “strong” leadership; in fact their values appear to have been very little different from those of the society in which they found themselves. On the other hand, Paul’s paradigm for ministry was not one of power, at least, not as people normally defined power. Instead it was based on divine power, power that was demonstrated in the death and resurrection of Jesus who was “crucified as a result of weakness” but “raised as a result of God’s power” (2 Cor 13:4). Paul maintained that those who would follow Jesus, who would be ministers of Christ, must walk the same path he did, and he demonstrated that in the way he interacted with, and ministered to, the congregation in Corinth.
Chapter 3
Paradigm for Ministry

2 Corinthians 10-13

Introduction

In 2 Corinthians 10-13 Paul addressed the explicit and implicit accusations that had been made against him. That the relationship between Paul and the congregation in Corinth had been strained for some time is evident from what Paul had to say in 2 Corinthians 1-9, and even in what he had written in 1 Corinthians.

The situation had been aggravated, however, by the arrival of some people who claimed to be apostles, but their manner of functioning was significantly different from Paul’s. Their demonstration of “apostleship” was more to the Corinthians’ liking, and thus implicitly raised questions regarding the validity of Paul’s apostleship. It seems likely that they also openly questioned Paul’s methods, and consequently his apostleship, perhaps going as far as to state that his apostleship was inferior, or even false.

Each of the accusations that appear to have been made against Paul was, in some way, an accusation of being a “weak apostle” and consequently, a question regarding the validity of his apostleship. This was not a new issue. As early as 1 Cor 9:1 there is a hint that some had questioned the validity of his apostleship. Paul’s change in travel plans and the problem that gave rise to those changes
(2 Cor 1:15-2:11) had also raised questions about Paul’s integrity. By the time of writing 2 Corinthians 10-13, however, the situation had intensified and so Paul tackled the accusations and questions head on.

It is in this situation that Paul explicitly stated his paradigm for ministry. In 2 Cor 13:1-4 Paul promised to visit and declared that he would not spare them when he arrived. He had already warned them on his previous visit, and reiterated that warning in this letter. It would seem that some were looking for proof that he was a genuine apostle and that Christ spoke through him (13:3a). His response was that Christ was not weak among them, but powerful (13:3b) and the basis for Christ working powerfully among them was that “he was crucified as a result of weakness, but he lives as a result of God’s power” (13:4a). Consequently, this was also the basis for Paul’s ministry among them, as he went on to declare: “so we also in our dealings with you, share in his weakness, but we will live with him as a result of God’s power” (13:3b). It was as Paul shared in the weakness and shame of the cross that he also shared in the power and glory of the resurrection. Both were vital for ministry. It would seem that the Corinthians, spurred on by the newcomers, wanted and expected the power and glory of the resurrection without the weakness and shame of the cross. But Paul maintained that that was not an option; both were necessary and he demonstrated that principle by the way he lived and undertook ministry. It was in the midst of weakness, opposition, suffering, persecution and distress that he learned to rely on God and thus his ministry could be in God’s power and not his own. This is the theological underpinning for what Paul would say in response to the specific accusations and insinuations that had come his way.
Structure of 2 Corinthians 10-13

Apart from the “Fool’s Speech” (11:1-12:13) in the centre, it is difficult to identify the structure of 2 Corinthians 10-13 with any certainty. As is often the case with Paul, one topic flows into another without clear breaks between sections, resulting in an almost universal opinion that these chapters form one distinct section. A number of commentators have discerned something of a chiastic or concentric structure, but there is no clear consensus on details. Some of the features that are noted as evidence of a chiastic structure, particularly in chapters 10 and 13, are as follows:

- The section begins and ends with an appeal using the verb παρακαλέω (10:1; 13:11).
- Paul spoke of his absence and presence in Corinth (10:1-2, 10; 13:1-2, 10).
- Twice Paul spoke of his willingness to be bold in his dealing with them when he arrived (10:2; 13:10).
- The matter of the Corinthians’ obedience is explicitly mentioned in 10:6 and implied in 13:1-10.
- “Belonging to Christ” (10:7) is later expressed as “living in the faith” (13:5).
- Paul used imagery that probably derived from Jeremiah (esp. Jer 1:10; 24:6), to affirm that his authority (ἐξουσία) was from the Lord, “for building up and not for tearing down” (10:8; 13:10).
- Paul mentioned his previous and/or current writing (10:9-11; 13:10).

1 There are some differences of opinion as to the extent of the speech, with some regarding it as not beginning until 11:21b or 11:22 and ending at 12:10 or 12:18. Sometimes 11:22-12:10 is described as the “fool’s speech proper” with 11:1-21 forming an introduction, an explanation of why Paul felt it necessary to boast in this manner, and 12:11-13 (or 18) forming a postscript reiterating his reasons.

2 Garland (1999, pp 422-423) and Lambrecht (2001, pp 305-322) both note this sort of a structure but have different identifications of the individual sections within the structure.
• The antitheses of “humility”/“boldness” and “weakness”/“power” are present at both the beginning and the end (10:1-6, 10; 13:3-4, 8-9).
• There are assertions at the beginning and end of the “Fool’s Speech” that Paul was in no way inferior to the “super-apostles” (11:5; 12:11).
• Paul twice admitted to some sort of deficiency (11:6; 12:11).
• He twice mentioned the matter of not accepting financial support from the Corinthians as an expression of his love for them (11:7-11; 12:13-18), with mention of “sin” (11:7) and “wrong” (12:13), and admission of accepting support from others (11:8-9; 12:13), and an emphasis on not burdening them (11:7, 9; 12:13) in both contexts.
• Chapters 11 and 12 focus on Paul’s boasting about his experience in the past (and by implication, the present), while chapters 10 and 13 focus on the future. Whether this is sufficient evidence to identify a chiastic structure, or whether it simply indicates that in his conclusion Paul reiterated some matters that he had highlighted in his introduction, is debateable and there is no agreement among commentators. However, the evidence suggests more than simple coincidence, and would appear to indicate some care in structuring on Paul’s part. Whatever conclusion is drawn regarding the structure of 2 Cor 10-13, Paul’s overall argument – his defence of his apostolic ministry as modelled on the death and resurrection of Jesus in contrast to the ministry of the newcomers modelled on the social conventions of society – is a coherent whole.
Boasting

The “Fool’s Speech” is, in essence, Paul meeting the expectations of the Corinthian church that he boast in his achievements. However, the manner in which he does this and the things about which he boasts cut right across their expectations. As has already been highlighted, boasting was a part of the culture. Witherington (1995, p 432) summarises:

Self-admiration and praise were de rigeur in Greco-Roman society, especially for those who wanted to raise their social status and social elevation in the eyes of others. Even more to the point, self-praise was a primary characteristic of popular teachers of the day, both rhetors and some philosophers.

The Corinthian Christians appear to have imbibed the values of the society around them. The importance of boasting is demonstrated by the number of times the verb καυχάμαι (“to boast”) and its cognates appear in the Corinthian correspondence – more than twice the number in the rest of the Pauline letters.³ There are two key references in 1 Corinthians where Paul argued that none of them – and by extrapolation, no one else either – had any grounds for boasting. In 1 Cor 1:26-31 Paul reminded the Corinthians of their background and noted that it was “so that no one might boast in the presence of God” (1:29). God was the source of their life (1:30) and so he concluded, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” (1:31; cf. Jer 9:23, 9:22 LXX). Shortly afterwards in 1 Cor 4:6-7 Paul reminded them that everything they had, they had received as a gift and so there was no room for boasting. Much of the argument in between these two references is focused on reconciling the divisions within the congregation that had formed because of a culture of boasting, not only in one’s own achievements, but also in the achievements of the leaders and/or patrons that one owed allegiance to.

³ Thirty-nine times in 1 and 2 Corinthians, and only fifteen times in other Pauline letters (Savage, 1996, p 54).
The newcomers who claimed to be apostles catered to the cultural preconceptions of the church in Corinth as they engaged in boasting in a manner similar to that of the surrounding society. Using irony in 2 Cor 10:12-18, Paul castigated those who built on the work of others and boasted in it as if it was all their own work. Again Paul alluded to Jeremiah with the phrase “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord” (10:17). Although the exact nuance of 2 Cor 11:12 is debated, it is clear that once again Paul castigated these false apostles for the way they boasted, and then noted that “many boast according to human standards” (11:18a). Savage (1996, p 57) draws the following conclusion:

> It is clear from these observations that the boasting of the opponents is impelled by self-confidence and manifested in self-commendation. The goal of such boasting is to achieve personal pre-eminence, and especially over Paul in the area of his ministry, the Corinthian church. It thus bears a striking resemblance to the competitive boasting so prominent in the first-century Corinth. Perhaps, then, the opponents are reflecting the arrogant ways of their culture, which in turn suggests that the members of the Corinthian church, in paying homage to the opponents, are showing the same attraction to that culture.

At first glance, it would seem that Paul boasted in a similar manner; he even announced that “since many boast according to human standards, I will also boast” (11:18). But, he repeatedly noted that such boasting was foolishness (11:1, 16-18, 21; 12:1, 11) and that he only engaged in it because the Corinthians had forced him to (12:11). And while he used the familiar form of boasting, he did so with irony, particularly in the earlier parts of the “Fool’s Speech” with statements such as, “To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that” (11:21a), which not only played on the fact that he had been accused of being weak, but also acted as criticism of those who had been “strong” and domineering.

Paul is responding in kind to his opponents’ boasting like fools, though he does so in anti-Sophistic fashion, rejecting the sort of public display seen in the Sophists and in the inscriptions about them. … [H]e parodies Sophistic
eloquence and rhetorical self-praise. His ethic of humility or self-humbling modelled on Christ stands at odds with the sort of classical ideas embodied in Socrates and his teaching (Witherington, 1995, p. 436).

This is particularly evident in the content of his boasting, which was radically different from that of his opponents. If he must boast, he said, he would “boast in the things that show my weakness” (11:30). This statement concluded a section where he boasted of his hardships and sufferings for the sake of the gospel. Following it he retold the story of his ignominious retreat from Damascus (11:32-33), and then went on to talk about the “thorn in the flesh” that was given to him to stop him from becoming proud (12:7-9). Paul used this pattern of “foolish boasting” to address the accusations and insinuations that had been levelled against him, with the purpose of bringing the Corinthians to their senses. He was not specifically trying to win over his opponents, but he was endeavouring to alert the Corinthians to the way they had foolishly submitted to the demands of the newcomers. There was, however, a risk to this approach, as Harris (2005, p. 730) notes:

If Paul refused to adopt the tactics of his adversaries and refrained from foolish boasting, he would risk losing the Corinthians to a false gospel (11:4), but if he chose to indulge in a temporary foray into foolish boasting he risked being misunderstood by the Corinthians and playing into the hands of his rivals. Because the former risk was the greater, he chose the way of “a little bit of foolishness: (11:1), “a little boasting” (11:16).

Paul confronted them on their own terms in the hope that this would make them aware of the situation they had allowed themselves to be in, and cause them to do something about it.

**Accusations Against Paul**

The implied accusations in 2 Corinthians 10-13 revolve around Paul’s authority as an apostle and the way that had been questioned not only by the newcomers, but
also by some of the congregation in Corinth. Paul maintained that his authority was from the Lord and was for “building up and not tearing down” (10:8; 13:10). This was an authority of which he was not ashamed (10:8), and although he did not want to frighten them (10:9), he would exercise that authority if need be (10:11). His exercise of authority was with the “meekness and gentleness of Christ” (10:1), but that did not mean that he would tolerate disobedience.

**Inconsistency**

In an aside in his opening statement, “I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold towards you when away” (10:1), Paul drew attention to one accusation that had arisen out of the issue of his authority, one that questioned his consistency. This is expanded in 10:10 with a direct quotation of the accusation: “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.” Paul’s letters were strong but, they said, he did not back that up with strength when he was with them.

With his first few phrases, “I, myself, Paul, appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ”, Paul anticipated this accusation. Unlike the newcomers who at the time were dominating the Corinthian congregation (11:20), he followed Christ’s example by dealing with them with meekness and gentleness. His purpose was to “build up” and not to “tear down” (10:8; 12:19; 13:12). His letters were an appeal to them to put things right so that when he arrived he would “not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord has given [him]” (13:10). However, if they did not take heed he would “be bold” (13:2): what he
had said in his letters, he would put into practice when he arrived (10:11), although it was his hope that that would not be necessary (13:10).

The fact that previously he had chosen to send a letter rather than visit (1:12-2:4) may well have exacerbated this situation. Those who wanted to argue that there was an inconsistency between Paul’s letters and the way he acted and spoke in person could, and probably did, point to this incident as proof. However, as Paul had been at pains to point out, the reason for his writing rather than visiting, was to spare them pain and to give them the opportunity to set things right (1:23). It was the result of love (2:4), not the result of inconsistency. The same was still true (12:19). Rather than being a sign of weakness, his gentleness with them was in order to give them time to deal with their problems themselves. The Corinthians had interpreted Paul’s actions as timidity (ταπεινός, 10:1b) and weakness (ἀσθενής, 10:10) but:

The meekness and gentleness of Christ can be seen in his patient restraint from pronouncing judgement, as he did before in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5. Like Christ, Paul is giving the Corinthians one last chance to repent. … As the Davidic Messiah, no one should confuse Christ’s meekness in his first coming with a lack of resolve to judge when he returns. Far from timidity, his “meekness” is his slowness to anger; far from lacking conviction, his “gentleness” is his forbearance, in contrast to being vindictive (Hafemann, 2000, p 393).

Paul’s actions were modelled on those of Christ. As an expression of Christ’s meekness and gentleness, his “boldness” in writing was designed to bring about repentance. But the opportunity to repent would not last forever. Consequently, as an expression of Christ’s meekness and gentleness, a time for dealing severely with disobedience would indeed come. The next time Paul visited he would deal with them severely if it was necessary, and that too would probably not be to their
liking (12:20). But that was not the outcome he desired, so he continued to appeal to them to listen to him and “put things in order” (13:11).

**Human Standards**

It would seem that some saw this apparent inconsistency in Paul’s behaviour as a sign that he functioned simply by “human standards” (κατὰ σάρκα, 10:2), and not in a “spiritual” manner. This was not a new accusation. Paul had already addressed the issue of accusations that he functioned by human standards with regards to his changes in travel plans (1:17). Now he addressed the accusation with regards to the apparent inconsistency between his letters and the way he behaved and spoke in person.

Paul admitted to living as a human being (ἐν σαρκί, 10:3), but when it came to dealing with arguments and obstacles raised against the knowledge of God, his methods and weapons were not merely human (οὐ κατὰ σάρκα,10:3; οὐ σαρκικά, 10:4). They had a power that could only come from God (δύνατὰ τῷ θεῷ, 10:4), a power that would be effective in dealing with disobedience (10:6).

In contrast to the “timidity”, “weakness” and inconsistency that he had been accused of, Paul used military imagery, particularly that of siege warfare: “weapons of warfare” (ὄπλα τῆς στρατείας, 10:4); the “tearing down” (καθάρεσις/καθαρέω, 10:4) of “strongholds”/“fortresses” (ὀχυρωμάτων, 10:4), “arguments” (λογισμοὺς, 10:4), and “obstacles raised up”/“raised rampart” (ὕψωμα ἐπιφρόμενον, 10:5); “taking captive/prisoner” (αἰχμαλώτιζοντες, 10:5) all “thoughts”/“designs”/“plots” (νόημα, 10:5), and “being ready” (ἐν ἐτοίμῳ ἔχοντες, 10:5).
10:6) “to punish all disobedience/insubordination” (ἐκδικήσω καὶ πᾶσαν παρακοήν, 10:6). With this sort of language, Paul went on the offensive. He was not the passive and ineffectual apostle that some believed him to be.

What is also evident is that this offensive was not the result of human effort. While the significance of the dative in the phrase δυνατὰ τῷ θεῷ (10:4) is debated, the context makes it plain that Paul acted on behalf of God, for God’s purposes, and in God’s power. It forms a practical example of the paradigm with which Paul would conclude the letter by explicitly articulating that Christ “was crucified as a result of weakness, but he lives as a result of God’s power. So we also in our dealings with you, share in his weakness, but we will live with him as a result of God’s power” (13:4). As Barnett (1997, p 463) concludes:

Here once more is an expression of the power-in-weakness paradox of apostolic ministry. Like all other people who “live in the flesh,” Paul is a mere “jar of clay” (4:7), who “outwardly” is “wasting away” (4:16), a “thorn”-afflicted man (12:7). Yet he is in the midst of such weakness an effective bearer of the word of God (2:17; 3:2-3; 4:1-6; 5:11-12; 11:2; 12:19; 13:3-4). But because he is “in the flesh,” it can only be the gospel-word, the “treasure” itself (4:7), not its frail, ever debilitating, human bearer, that is powerful in achieving God’s purposes. Paul’s catalogues of personal suffering in obedience to apostolic ministry (4:7-10; 6:4-10; 11:23-12:10) mark him out as one who “walks in the flesh,” in implicit denial that the triumph of God could ever be attributable to him in himself. His power, that is, Christ’s power, for both living and serving, is perfected in weakness (12:9) (emphasis original).

Paul was unequivocal that while he functioned “in the flesh” (ἐν σαρκί), he did not function “according to the flesh” (κατὰ σάρκα), that is, he was a physical human being subject to all the limitations of being human, but he did not function according to human standards or worldly principles. Rather, he functioned under the control of the Spirit and in the power of God. This was in stark contrast to

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4 Harris (2005, pp 679-680) lists the various ways of interpreting the dative.
those who made such accusations against him, but at the same time went on to
“boast according to human standards” (11:18).

**Incompetent Speaker**

The accusation of inconsistency also highlights the accusation of being a poor
speaker, that his speech was, in fact, “contemptible” or “of no account”
(ἐξουθενημένος, 10:10). This was associated with a physical presence that was
weak; not only his speech, but his whole manner of presenting himself did not
meet the expectation of the Corinthians. This was an accusation to which Paul
would return later in the letter where he admitted that “I may be untrained in
speech, but not in knowledge” (11:6). While he admitted to a deficiency – at least
in terms of the Corinthians’ ideal – in his ability to speak, he was not prepared to
make any such admission when it came to “knowledge”. The irony is that in the
matter of “knowledge” he had communicated effectively in spite of accusations to
the contrary.

Just how “untrained” in speech Paul actually was is a matter of much debate. It
is apparent that the Corinthians regarded him as somehow incompetent or
deficient in the matter of rhetorical discourse, but his letters display a certain
familiarity with and use of the rhetorical conventions of the day. However, as he
had already told them in a previous letter (1 Cor 1:17; 2:1-5), he deliberately
shunned “plausible words of wisdom” or “eloquent wisdom” so that the power of

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5 For discussions of the issues and a range of views relating to Paul’s rhetorical training and
abilities, see Judge, (1968, pp 37-60), Garland (1989, p 376), Savage (1996, pp 69-80), Barnett,
the cross of Christ might not be diminished, and that their faith might be based on
God’s power, not on human wisdom.

It would seem that while Paul endeavoured to be an effective communicator of the
gospel – and the very existence of the church in Corinth was evidence that he had
been effective – and used some rhetorical devices in order to be effective, he
shunned the flamboyant and manipulative styles of some professional rhetors. At
least some of the Corinthians, however, preferred a more “eloquent” style, and the
new arrivals apparently provided what they were looking for.

**Commentation**

The matter of Paul’s lack of letters of recommendation was apparently a sore
point. But as Paul had already pointed out (3:1-2), the very existence of the
church in Corinth was all the recommendation he needed. An initial reading of
the passages in 2 Corinthians where Paul discussed commendation appears to give
mixed messages, for in some places (e.g. 3:1-3; 5:12) he seems to deny that he
engaged in self-commendation, while in other places (e.g. 4:2; 6:4-10) he appears
to have commended himself. The key, perhaps, is that he differentiated between
“self-commendation” (ἐαυτοῦς συνιστάνειν, 3:1; 5:12; 10:12, 18), which is always
negative, and “commending oneself” (συνιστάνειν ἐαυτοῦς, 4:2; 6:4; 7:11; cf.
12:11), which is the positive commendation that is backed up by the
commendation of the Lord.

In 10:12-18 Paul dealt with the related issues of self-commendation and
comparison. A standard technique of self-commendation, and one that the
newcomers appear to have been using, was that of comparing oneself favourably with others. The references to “boasting beyond limits” (10:13, 15), which Paul defined as boasting in the work of others, suggests that in the light of what they were currently achieving, the newcomers were taking credit for the whole of the work in Corinth, including that done by Paul. Paul pointed out the futility of such an approach, for the only appropriate boasting was boasting in the Lord, and the only commendation that really mattered was the commendation given by the Lord. This raises the question of what constituted “boasting in the Lord” and the “Lord’s commendation”. What Paul boasted in was what God had enabled him to do in reaching Corinth with the gospel (3:2; 10:14). And when he commended himself he did so by pointing to the evidence of God’s approval of his message and ministry: “through an open statement of the truth” (4:2) and “through great endurance” (6:4). When Paul returned to the topic of commendation at the end of the “Fool’s Speech” it was to remind the Corinthians that he should not have had to commend himself; the result of his work in bringing them the gospel should have been that they commended him. Unfortunately, what he had received from them was not commendation, but accusations and questions.

Lack of Integrity with Money

From early in his relationship with the Corinthian congregation, money had been an issue (1 Cor 9:1-18), and this was again raised in such a way as to question Paul’s validity as an apostle. It was Paul’s policy to proclaim the gospel free of charge (1 Cor 9:18; 2 Cor 11:7). His custom when planting a new church was not to take money from new converts, but rather to support himself by working at his trade (Acts 18:3; 20:34-35; 1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8). This was supplemented
from time to time with gifts from already established churches (2 Cor 11:9; Phil 4:15). This practice offended the Christians in Corinth who interpreted it as a lack of love for them (2 Cor 11:11; 12:15), at least in part because Paul still continued his policy of not accepting money from them. Twice he affirmed that this would be the case when he visited the next time as well. With irony he asked, “Did I commit a sin … because I proclaimed God’s good news to you free of charge?” (11:9) and when he returned to the topic he begged, “Forgive me this wrong!” (12:14).

In contrast to the Sophists of the day, Paul refused to charge fees, but persisted in earning his living at a manual trade, something not socially acceptable amongst the elite. In an honour-shame society, having an apostle who was impoverished and who did manual labour was a source of shame. It removed any possibility of increased status and any opportunity to boast, and forced them to identify with the poverty and low status of their apostle, who in turn, identified with the crucified Christ.

Paul’s practice cut across what the Corinthians regarded as socially acceptable.6 They lived in a society that was largely defined by patron-client relationships.

Paul refused to become the client of anyone or any group by accepting money from them. Such refusal was perceived as tantamount to a refusal of friendship. Unlike the churches in Macedonia from which Paul had repeatedly received financial help, he was still unwilling to accept money from the church in Corinth.

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even though by this time it was a well-established church. It is perhaps because the traditions of patron-client relationships and of boasting in one’s status and achievements were so ingrained, as evidenced by the divisions that had formed around various leaders (1 Corinthians 1-4), that Paul continued to maintain this policy with regard to Corinth.

Jesus’ statement that “the labourer deserves to be paid” (Luke 10:7) had established a principle that those who worked for the sake of the gospel should earn their living from it. Paul himself reaffirmed this principal (1 Cor 9:6-12; cf. 1 Tim 5:17-18; Gal 6:6), but chose not to exercise this right. Perhaps the nearest analogy today would be that of a pastor who has secular employment, is superannuated, or has some other source of independent income, going into a church that is having difficulties with the express purpose of helping them to deal with their problems. The independent income provides the opportunity to tackle the hard issues without the threat of personal financial ramifications being imposed by the church. Paul refused to be financially indebted to anyone in the Corinthian church, but rather actively maintained his financial independence. In contrast, it would seem that the new arrivals in Corinth not only exercised the right to financial support from the church, but used it as an excuse to make demands (2 Cor 11:20). From the way Paul responded, it seems likely that they used this as a proof that they were genuine apostles, and in the process implied that Paul’s apostleship was perhaps not genuine, or was at least inferior (11:12). Paul would not allow his policy of not accepting payment to be “hushed up” or ignored (11:10) and he would not play into his opponents’ hands by functioning the way they did (11:12). While there is debate about the exact meaning of 2 Cor
11:12, what the context makes clear is that Paul refused to be pushed into the mould of these newcomers whom he regarded as false apostles. In no way would he allow them to be regarded as his equals or give them an opportunity to boast. They “put on airs”, “preyed” on people and “took advantage” of people (11:20). Paul would have no part in that way of functioning, for such a way of functioning was tantamount to proclaiming “another Jesus … a different spirit … a different gospel” (11:4).

There is also a hint that some people in Corinth felt that Paul was not being altogether honest with regard to money (12:14-18; cf. 8:16-24). While he did not accept money from them directly, he did accept, and in fact asked for, money for the collection to aid the church in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8-9). He also sent some of his co-workers to Corinth on his behalf. It seems that some, at least, had questioned whether the money given to the collection had been diverted to Paul’s use, and whether Paul had gained money from them via his co-workers. Paul’s response vehemently denied these charges (12:16-18), not by directly saying he was innocent, but by challenging them to examine the evidence. In particular, he called them to look at the example of Titus and the other person whom Paul had sent with Titus, and to examine whether they had taken advantage of the Corinthians in any way (12:18). Clearly, he expected the answer to be “No!” Just as those whom Paul had sent on his behalf had not cheated the Corinthians, neither had he. Rather than his behaviour being due to cheating them, or even the result of indifference or lack of love, it was actually an example of parental love and care. Just as parents provide for their children, so Paul provided for his spiritual children and would “most gladly spend and be spent” for them (12:15).
The appropriate response from the Corinthians was not accusations and innuendo, but reciprocated love.

Heritage

It seems that Paul’s opponents were boasting in their ethnic and religious heritage as Jews, and perhaps questioning Paul’s heritage – after all, he came from Tarsus, not Jerusalem. On the issue of heritage, however, Paul could match them (11:22), and in the matter of serving Christ and suffering for Christ, he could well and truly outdo them (11:23-28). To boast of such things though, says Paul, was to speak as a fool.

For the sake of jolting the Corinthians to the reality of the deception they had fallen into, Paul was prepared to meet his opponents on their own terms, that of boasting. Whatever they “dared” to boast of, he would also “dare” (τολμάω) to boast of – even though to do so was to speak as a fool (11:21). With the use of three rhetorical questions, Paul addressed the issue of heritage. A key word is κακαγώ (lit. “and I”; 11:21, 22[3x]; cf. 11:16, 18): when it came to willingness to make bold claims he could say, “I will also dare” and with regard to being a “Hebrew”, an “Israelite”, a “descendant of Abraham”, he could say, “So am I!” In these areas Paul was willing to claim equality with his opponents. But when it came to serving Christ, he was not willing to claim equality. In fact, he would claim nothing less than superiority; now the key word is not κακαγώ, but ἵππερ ἐγώ, “I am so even more” (BDAG, 2000, p 1031b). And though he was serious in his claim, he confessed that to make such a claim was to be “out of his mind” (11:23).
In 11:23-29 Paul expanded on how he was a “better servant of Christ”. He began with four general statements which reflect an increasing intensity of suffering in ministry: “worked much harder, imprisoned more often, beaten more severely, in danger of death more times” (11:23b). This is then followed by four phrases (11:24-25), all with numerical indicators, and all of which are examples of “being in danger of death”. This is, in turn, followed by specific dangers Paul encountered on his journeys; four identify sources of danger and four identify locations or situations of danger (11:26). Paul then shifted his focus from the dangers he had encountered in ministry to the hard work he had engaged in and its consequences (cf. 11:23b). His “hard work” and “hardship” (11:27a) are expanded with four phrases, twice including the statement that these things have occurred “many times” (πολλάκις; 11:27b,c). Paul concluded this boasting in ministry in which he exceeded his opponents, with a mention of the pressure of concern for the churches (11:28), and a mention of his concern for the well-being of individuals (11:29). Unlike his opponents, real concern for the churches and the people in those churches, rather than self-interest, was a driving force for Paul.

If Paul was going to boast, these are the things he would boast about: the things that showed his weakness (11:30). These were not the things his opponents boasted about, nor were they the things the Corinthian Christians expected Paul to boast about. What the Corinthians valued was power, control and success; hardship and hard work were not high on their priority list. They had forced Paul to “boast”, but his boasting was not the normal boasting of society, for Paul insisted on boasting about his weakness.
The nature of this ‘weakness’ has already been set out by Paul in 11:23-29, in the so-called catalogue of woes and sufferings, a list of personal afflictions so horrific that it would have elicited feelings of extreme contempt among his readers. By boasting of such humiliations the apostle would seem to be reveling in his disgrace (Savage, 1996, p 63).

That Paul goes on to tell the story of his escape from Damascus, highlights his unusual and confronting idea of boasting:

In the first century the highest military award, the *corona muralis*, was reserved for the man first up the wall in the heat of battle. In Paul’s moment of danger he was lowered through the wall in a basket! Such an event would have been regarded as profoundly humiliating and certainly not worthy of one’s boast. Yet the fact that Paul does glory in it suggests that he is parodying the world’s idea of boasting (Savage, 1996, p 63).

The content of Paul’s boasting was diametrically opposed to that of society generally, and, it would seem, that of the Corinthian congregation. But the things of which Paul boasted were the things that demonstrated that Paul functioned in the same pattern as Christ. As Christ was “crucified as a result of weakness” but was “raised as a result of God’s power”, so too Paul would “share in his weakness” but would also “live with him as a result of God’s power” in his dealings with the Corinthians (13:4).

Paul backed this up with an oath: God knew that he did not lie (11:31). It is unclear whether in the literary context this oath applies to what had gone before, or to what Paul was about to say, or perhaps to both. Logically, though, it could be applied to all that Paul said, both preceding and following. In all the things in which he had boasted of being equal to or superior to his opponents, God knew that he told the truth. In the matter of his ignominious escape from Damascus, an escape that could only demonstrate his weakness, God also knew that he told the truth. And, by implication, so should the Corinthians!
Ecstatic Visions and Miraculous Signs

In chapter 12 Paul turned to the topic of visions and revelations (12:1-10) and miraculous signs (12:11-12). His opponents seem to have regarded having ecstatic visions and revelations and being able to perform miraculous signs as part of the required proof of being an apostle. The inference is that they boasted of such things, and in so doing depreciated Paul’s performance in this area.

Reluctantly, Paul recounted a revelation of outstanding nature, but at the same time refused to divulge the content of that revelation. If he were to boast of such things he would be speaking the truth, but such revelations were not to be the basis of appraising his ministry. Rather, the way he performed that ministry, what he said and did, were to be the basis of appraisal. Paul also closely linked his revelations of exceptional character with his weakness, in particular, his “thorn in the flesh”. If visions and revelations were signs of apostleship, so was weakness. 7

Paul gently reminded them that “signs and wonders and mighty works” had been performed among them, but the passive voice highlights the fact that it was not Paul who had done these things, but God. Once again, Paul reminded them, though somewhat obliquely on this occasion, that it was they themselves who were the seal of his apostleship (1 Cor 9:2; cf. 2 Cor 3:1-3). A mighty work of the Spirit had resulted in them becoming Christians. It was their existence as a Christian community that proved the validity of Paul’s apostleship.

7 This topic will be developed more fully in the following chapter.
Inferiority

All of these accusations, overt or implied, added up to the suggestion that if Paul was an apostle at all, he was an inferior one. This was a conclusion that Paul strongly denied. Twice in these four chapters Paul stated, “I am not in the least inferior to these ‘super-apostles’” (11:5; 12:11).

He may have been weak, and in such weakness he would boast, but that did not make him inferior. It was his weakness in fact that demonstrated that he was a genuine apostle, for in his weakness he was following the example of Christ. As Christ was crucified as a result of weakness, so Paul also shared in that weakness (13:4). But with the weakness of the cross, came the demonstration of God’s power in the resurrection. Likewise, God’s power would be demonstrated to the Corinthians even through a “weak” apostle.

Paradigm for Ministry (2 Cor 13:4)

As Paul began to conclude his letter, he directly addressed those who wanted “proof” (13:3) that he was a genuine apostle and that what he said did indeed represent Christ’s teaching. In answer to this he provided a summary of his paradigm for ministry:

He [Christ] is not weak in his dealings with you, but is powerful among you, for indeed he was crucified as a result of weakness, but lives as a result of God’s power. So we also in our dealings with you, share in his weakness, but we will live with him as a result of God’s power (2 Cor 13:3b-4).
The specific context is dealing with those who continued to rebel. In 13:1-2 Paul confirmed that he was planning to visit a third time and assured them that when he came he would not “spare” (φείδομαι) them. Mention of coming a “third” (τρίτον) time (13:1a) and memory of the previous “second” (δεύτερον) visit (13:2a) provides a link to the slightly abbreviated quotation from Deut 19:15 in 13:1b: “An accusation is to be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses” (ἐπὶ στόματος δύο μαρτύρων καὶ τριῶν σταθήσεται πάν ῥῆμα). There is debate as to the application of the quotation in this instance. Some understand it literally as an indication that Paul would formally initiate a hearing of charges. It is more common to see it as in some way metaphorical, the most common being to understand it either as a reference to Paul’s three visits or to the painful visit, this letter and the upcoming third visit (as the first visit when he planted the church could hardly be included as a witness against them). However, in Judaism, this Deuteronomic principle was applied more generally to support the practice of ensuring that someone suspected of an offence was given ample warning that they may be subject to punitive action. Paul may well have been using the reference in this manner to support his assertion that he had given them ample warning. And this is congruent with what he explicitly stated in 13:2, where he reminded them that he had already warned them, and now again warned them with this letter.

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9 Among those who understand it as judicial hearing are Barnett (1997, p 598), Hughes (1962, p 475) and Hafemann (2000, p 490).
10 Lambrecht (1999, p 221) argues that it is a reference to Paul’s three visits.
11 Furnish (1984, p 573) acknowledges the possibility of it being a reference to two visits and one letter, as does Martin (1986, p 470). Harris (2005, p 908) suggests warnings associated with visits. All three conclude it is more likely a reference to the rabbinic principle of forewarning those who were suspected of an offence.
On his next visit he would not “spare” (φείδομεν) them. While the verb originally referred to refraining from killing a defeated enemy, here a translation of “I will have no mercy” or “I will show no leniency” expresses the sentiment (Harris, 2005, p 911). Evidently this was to be a severe punishment, but exactly what it was is not spelled out. Suggestions include: (1) public censure, though whether this is sufficiently severe in the context is debateable; (2) removal from participating in certain aspects of church life such as the church meeting and/or the Eucharist; (3) complete expulsion from the church (cf. 1 Cor 5:13); and/or (4) handing offenders over to Satan “for the destruction of the flesh”, which may result in an illness that could lead to death (cf. 1 Cor 5:5; 11:30). This was not Paul’s desire, hence the delays and the warnings. His ministry was to “build up” rather than to “tear down”, but if “tearing down” and dealing “severely” was necessary, then he would do it (10:8; 13:10; cf. 1 Cor 4:21).

The reason Paul took this approach is provided in 13:3a: “since you are looking for proof that Christ is speaking through me” (ἐπεὶ δοκιμὰ ἦν ζητεῖτε τοῦ ἐν ἐμοὶ λαλοῦντος Χριστοῦ). For Paul the “proof” that Christ spoke through him was the fact that the Corinthians had come to believe (3:2), but if that was not “proof” enough for them, he would provide “proof” in the form of discipline. In the past he had dealt with them with “gentleness and meekness” (10:1), and had “spared” them (1:23). Quite possibly, the fact that he had not dealt decisively, severely or instantly with the situation on his “painful visit”, that he had chosen to write rather than make another such visit so as to give them the opportunity to repent, and that he had a “weak” physical presence” (10:10), had caused some to
conclude that he was incapable of dealing decisively or with authority. On his next visit, however, things would be different.

It would seem that the discipline had a twofold purpose; firstly to deal with those who were persisting in sin, and secondly to function as “proof” for those who doubted Paul’s apostolic authority. If they would not accept the “meekness and gentleness of Christ” in Paul, then they would face Christ’s judgement through Paul. However, it is unlikely that this was the “proof” the Corinthians had been hoping for. Their expectations of such “proof” were probably more along the lines of eloquent argument (cf. 10:10), exceptional ecstatic experiences (cf. 12:6), miraculous signs (cf. 12:12), or perhaps even bullying (cf. 11:20). They were, however, forgetting that Christ had worked powerfully among them (13:3b); there had been “signs and wonders and miracles” (12:12), not least of which was the miracle of their conversion. And it had been through Paul, as he had first brought the gospel to them (10:14), that such miracles had been performed. But if that was not enough “proof”, they would face judgement.

It is in this context that Paul provided his paradigm for ministry. He did this with three very structured and interrelated statements that include significant repetition, parallelism and contrasts, particularly of the “weakeness”/“power” antithesis. Perhaps the best way to express this is diagrammatically.12

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The noticeable contrasts are:

- Christ is “not weak” (οὐκ ἄσθενε, 3b) but “powerful” (δυνατεῖ, 3c) in his dealings with the Corinthians. In spite of what the Corinthians may have been saying (Barnett, 1997, p 604; Hafemann, 2000, p 490), the very existence of a Christian community in Corinth was evidence that Christ had worked powerfully “among” them (ἐν ὑμῖν) and in his “dealing with them” (ἐις ὑμᾶς).

- Christ “was crucified” (ἐσταυρώθη, aorist, 4a) but now “lives” (ζήσει, present, 4b).

- Christ’s crucifixion was the “result of weakness” (ἐκ δυνάμεως θεοῦ, 4a); his life is the “result of God’s power” (ἐκ δυνάμεως θεοῦ, 4b).  

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13 This view assumes the ἐκ functions in the same way in both clauses, that is, as causal. Thus a translation of “due to”, “because of” or “as a result of” fits both phrases. Heckel (1993, pp 124-130; cited in Hafemann, 2000, p 491; Harris, 2005, pp 914-915; and Thrall, 200, p 884) argues that Paul uses identical prepositions in antithesis to heighten the contrast. Here it heightens the contrast between human weakness and divine power. A translation of “from a position of weakness” or “in weakness” means that a different use of ἐκ must be posited for the two uses as it would be difficult to apply this usage to God’s power.
• In each of the three statements (3b,c; 4a,b and 4c,d), there is a strong contrast between “weakness” and “power”.

• Paul “is weak” (ἀδέσποτος, present, 4c) but “will live” (ζωός, future, 4d). While the statement does have a “weakness”/“power” contrast, structurally “we are weak” is contrasted with “we will live”. The “we are weak” would include Paul’s various hardships (4:8-12; 6:4-5. 8-10) 11:23b-27; 12:10), with perhaps an emphasis on the “thorn” (12:7) so recently elaborated on. It would also include the Corinthians’ perception of his “timidity” (10:1), his lack of eloquence (11:6), his inconsistency between speech and writing (10:1, 10), his lack of forcefulness (11:21), and so on. As the “weakness” clearly involved his interaction with the Corinthians, so too, it would seem, would his “life”, despite the common use of ζωή to refer to eschatological or resurrection life.

• There are differences, perhaps even some sort of progression, in the tenses of the verbs: present (3a), present (3b); present (3c); followed by aorist (4a), present (4b); and present (4c), future (4d). In response to the Corinthians’ current questioning whether Christ spoke through Paul, he reminded them that Christ not only had in the past, but was currently working powerfully in his dealings with them. This is the background against which Paul notes that Christ was crucified, something of which the Corinthians were well aware. They should also have been aware that Christ is now living as a result of God’s power.14 Paul admitted what the Corinthians had concluded about him: he is weak. But they should also have known that he will deal with them in a living and powerful way as a result of God’s power and his association with Christ.

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14 While Christ’s death was a single event, his life is ongoing. This form of statement is in contrast to other statements regarding Christ’s death in which two aorists are linked with καί: “Christ died and rose again” (1 Thess 4:14, cf. Rom 14:9) (Harris, 2005, p 915).
The noticeable parallels are:

- Christ was powerful in “dealing with you” (*eic ήμας*), and so would Paul be (beginning of 3b and end of 4d). “Logically the train of thought in v.4 must indicate that what took place in Christ cannot but take place in the apostle as well and that, concretely speaking, Christ is powerful among the Corinthians through Paul” (Lambrecht, 1994e, p 591).

- Paul was “weak in him” (*áσθενομεν εν αυτω*, 4c), that is, he shared in Christ’s weakness, which is described as “crucified as a result of weakness” (*εσταυρωθη εξ áσθενειας*, 4a). There is much discussion regarding what the “weakness” refers to in relation to Christ, and there have been numerous attempts to soften the statement. However, the most likely solution is that it is a reference to the real weakness inherent in Christ’s physical, human existence which was subject to death, but may also include an allusion to his obedience to God “to the point of death” (Phil 2:8) and/or an allusion to his non-retaliation during his trial and crucifixion (Matt 26-27; cf. 1 Pet 2:23).15

- Both Christ’s living (*ζη*, 4b) and Paul’s living (*ζησομεν*, 4d) were “as a result of God’s power” (*εκ δυναμεως θεου*, 4b,d). However, while Christ’s “living” is clearly a reference to resurrection life, the context (*eic ήμας* 2.4d) suggests

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15 For a discussion of the various views see Hafemann (2000, p 491) and Thrall (2000, pp 882-884), both of whom discuss Heckel’s work on this (*Kraft in Schwachheit*, 1993, pp 124-130). Options include: (1) Some, especially patristic interpreters, understood it to indicate human sin/weakness which Christ dealt with in his representative death, thus distancing Christ from weakness. (2) It expresses the viewpoint of unbelievers (so Chrysostom), that the cross appears to be weakness (cf. 1 Cor 1:18-25), but it is not real weakness. But Paul’s own real weakness is set in parallel with Christ’s weakness, making the argument dependent on Christ’s weakness being real. (3) That the εκ is not causal, giving rise to translations such as “as a weak person”, “in weakness” (so most translations including RSV, NEB, NIV, REB, NKJV, NRSV, NLT, ESV, TNIV). But the parallel with εκ δυναμεος θεου (“as a result of God’s power”) mitigates against this. (4) The result of Christ’s voluntary obedience to God (a parallel to “poor” in 2 Cor 8:9 and “emptying himself” in Phil 2:6-8). But this is not how “weakness” is used elsewhere in 2 Corinthians. (5) As a reference to Jesus’ physical human existence in which he was subject to death.
that Paul’s “living” was more to do with his upcoming visit to the Corinthians.16

• The “in him” (ἐν αὐτῷ, 4c) and “with him” (σὺν αὐτῷ, 4d) indicate that both Paul’s weaknesses and his power were determined by his relationship with Christ; the correspondence was not superficial, but was a direct consequence of Paul’s union with Christ. “As a result of being in Christ (ἐν αὐτῷ), Paul shared in the weakness of his crucified Master. As a result of his fellowship with Christ (σὺν αὐτῷ), he shared in the power of his risen Lord, a power imparted by God” (Harris, 2005, p 917). But the differences in tenses, noted above, indicate that there is also a contrast. Christ’s crucifixion was a completed action in the past, while Paul’s suffering and weakness were ongoing. Christ had been raised and continued to live in that resurrection life, whereas for Paul resurrection life was still a future prospect, even though he would in the meantime function in the power of Christ’s resurrection life in his dealings with the Corinthians.

• Both 4a and 4c begin with καὶ γάρ, though it is probably best to translate them slightly differently. The first one (4a) explains, or elaborates on, the previous statement (3b,c) – Christ’s death and resurrection were the grounds for Christ being powerful among them – so is best translated “for, indeed”. However, 4c does not explain 4a,b (though could be viewed as explaining 3a) – Paul’s weakness and power were not the grounds for Christ’s weakness and power – but rather provide a parallel between Paul’s ministry and that of Christ so, with the addition of ἵματις, καὶ γάρ is best translated “as we also” (Harris, 2005, pp 913-914; Lambrecht, 1994e, pp 590-591).

16 Though some understand it to be a reference to eschatological resurrection life, or at least a foreshadowing of that life.
• In both statements in verse 4 the contrast is set up with a γάρ … ἀλλά (4a,c … 4b,d) construction. And in both statements the “weakness”/“power” antithesis is the focus, as it is in 3b,c which uses an οὐκ … ἀλλά construction. However, in 3b,c, the same principle is stated twice, first negatively and then positively, but in verse 4, each statement forms a contrast. The first clause is common knowledge on which both Paul and his readers agree. The second clause flows out of the first, and while the Corinthians may readily agree to the consequence in the first statement (i.e., that “Christ lives as a result of God’s power”; 4b), they may not be so ready to acknowledge it with regard to the second clause (i.e., that in his dealings with them Paul “will live as a result of God’s power”; 4d).

Paul began 2 Cor 13:1-4 with a reference to the relationship between himself and the Corinthian congregation, and in particular to the way he would interact with them on his upcoming visit. Because they were looking for proof that Paul spoke and acted on behalf of Christ, Paul moved to the topic of Christ’s dealing with them, and the fact that in his dealings with them, Christ had not been “weak”, but had been, and continued to be, “powerful”. Christ’s “power” in his resurrection life, though, was preceded by the “weakness” of the cross. This brought Paul back to his own relationship with the church in Corinth. They were agreed that he was “weak”, but unlike the Corinthians who viewed such “weakness” as a disqualifier for apostleship, Paul argued that his “weakness” was not only patterned on, but was one with Christ’s “weakness”. The consequence was that in

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17 Lambrecht, in his translation renders this contrast as “although … certainly” (1999, p 220) placing the stress on the second clause in each contrast. He does this on the basis of his argument that the construction is the equivalent of a μὲν γάρ … δὲ construction where the first clause is concessive and the reason is found in the second clause (1994f, pp 594-595 ; 1996a, p 344).
his dealings with them, not only his “weakness”, but also his “power” would be
one with Christ’s. It would not be the human power of eloquent speech and
forceful bullying that the Corinthians admired in Paul’s opponents, but would
rather be divine power demonstrated in discipline.

In view of Paul’s planned visit to Corinth, and in response to the Corinthians’ call
for Paul to “prove” (δοκιμή, 13:3) himself, he called on them to examine
(πειράζω, 13:5) themselves and “prove” (δοκιμάζω, 13:5) whether they were “in
the faith” (εἰ ἐστέ ἐν τῇ πίστεί, 13:5). His hope and prayer was that they would
not “fail to meet the test” (ἀδόκιμος, 13:5), and that neither would he have
appeared to “fail the test” (ἀδόκιμος, 13:6) because of their disobedience. He
wanted them to do what was right, even if that meant that it appeared that he had
failed (13:7). He would rejoice in “weakness” (ἀθενέω, 13:9) if that meant their
“strength” (δύνατός, 13:9), that is, their being made “mature” (τῇ ὑμῶν
κατάρτισιν; 13:9).

There are a number of similarities in Paul’s argument here with what he had said
in 4:8-12. There, too, he had made a strong statement regarding his sharing both
in Christ’s death and resurrection life. While Christ’s death and resurrection were
sequential, in both passages Paul indicated that his sharing in that death and life
was, at least in his ongoing interactions with the Corinthians, simultaneous. “For
while we live, we are constantly being handed over to death for Jesus’ sake, so
that Jesus’ life might also be revealed in our mortal body” (4:11), parallels “so we
also, in our dealings with you, share in his weakness, but we will live with him as
a result of God’s power” (13:4). While the tenses in 13:4 are present followed by
future, the future “in our dealings with you” refers to his next visit, at which point in time Paul’s “weakness” would still be continuing. But the “in our dealings with you” (13:4) also highlights the fact that Paul’s sharing both in death/suffering/weakness was for the benefit of others, in this case, the Corinthians. This sentiment is expressed both in 13:3-10 and 4:8-12. Death (θάνατος, 4:12) and weakness (ἀθρόα, 13:9) in him resulted in life (ζωή, 4:12), strength (δύναμις, 13:9) and maturity (κατάρτισις, 13:9) in them. The same principle is also expounded in 1:3-7 where in his affliction Paul received God’s comfort, and both the affliction and the comfort were for the Corinthians’ comfort and salvation. Here, too, there is a strong link between Christ’s suffering and Paul’s, for Paul described his affliction as sharing in Christ’s suffering. And he went on to give the extreme example of the “affliction in Asia” where he had despaired of life itself, but in the process had learned to rely on “God who raises the dead”. In each of these passages, Paul’s experience both of “death” and of “life” was patterned on Christ whose death and life had benefit for others. And it was the result of God’s power, not human effort.

Conclusion

In stark contrast to the Corinthians, who appreciated the “ministry” of those who had recently arrived in Corinth and called themselves “apostles”, Paul’s paradigm for ministry was patterned on that of Christ. His being in union with Christ meant that his suffering and weakness, rather than disqualifying him from apostolic ministry, were the proof that his ministry was genuine. For just as Christ “was crucified as a result of weakness”, so too, Paul shared in that weakness. And just
as Christ “lives as a result of God’s power”, so too, Paul would live and function in relation to them “as a result of God’s power” (13:4). Unlike the newcomers who domineered and boasted in their achievements and “power” in a manner that fitted with the human standards of the day, the power in which Paul would function would be “God’s power” rather than his own power. As Harris (2005, p 917) concludes:

Paul is asserting that Christ’s career is the pattern for his own ministry. Just as Christ was crucified because of his “weakness” and now lives because of God’s power, so Paul, as a result of his faith union with Christ, shares the “weakness” of Christ’s passion and the effective power of God.

This was Paul’s paradigm for ministry. While he did not explicitly articulate it until the close of 2 Corinthians, it is the paradigm that underlies what Paul had to say in the earlier parts of the letter.
Introduction

As Paul concluded his letter to the Corinthians, and in response to the accusations and insinuations that had been levelled against him, he explicitly stated his paradigm for ministry:

He [Christ] is not weak in his dealings with you, but is powerful among you, for indeed he was crucified as a result of weakness, but lives as a result of God’s power. So we also in our dealings with you, share in his weakness, but we will live with him as a result of God’s power (2 Cor 13:3b-4).

Ministry was always to be done in God’s power, not human power. Throughout 2 Corinthians, and especially in 2 Corinthians 10-13, Paul described how this looked in practice: what it looked like to share in Christ’s weakness but also to live with him as a result of God’s power. Thus, it is in this context that 2 Cor 12:1-10 forms the climax of what Paul had said regarding weakness in 2 Corinthians as a whole and, in particular, in 2 Corinthians 10-13.

Throughout chapters ten and eleven he had been answering the accusation, in its various forms, that he was weak. He had dealt with accusations and inferences that he was inconsistent (10:1, 10), functioned by human standards (10:2), was a poor speaker (10:10), lacked integrity with money (11:7-11), and had a questionable heritage (11:22). His manner of dealing with these issues was to do what the Corinthians thought he should do, that is, to boast of his qualifications even though such boasting was, he said, foolishness (11:1, 21; 12:11). However,
the “qualifications” he boasted of were not what was expected. Instead of boasting in his power and eloquence, he boasted in his weaknesses, including his persecutions (11:23-33).

**Exegesis of 2 Cor 12:1-10**

In 12:1-10 Paul dealt specifically with the accusation, or at least inference, that he was “weak” in the matter of ecstatic visions. “It is necessary to go on boasting;” he said, “not that it will do any good, but I will go on to visions and revelations” (12:1). He proceeded to recount an experience he had had fourteen years earlier, although he told the story in the third person so it is not until 12:7 that it becomes clear that he was referring to himself. Paul gave only minimal details about the experience, and revealed nothing at all of the actual content of the revelation.

Given the context in which Paul recounted this experience, it would appear that in all his previous dealings with the church in Corinth, he had never revealed it. That he had revealed it now was not to be used as a basis for evaluating his genuineness as an apostle. He was always to be judged on the basis of what he said and did, not on the basis of ecstatic experiences (12:6).

While the situation in Corinth had forced Paul to reveal this experience, he did not stop with just revealing it, but went on to reveal what happened in the aftermath. Such exceptional visions and revelations could easily be the cause of enormous pride. In order to stop him from becoming proud, Paul was given a “thorn in the
flesh” (σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί; 12:7). Although this “thorn” was a “messenger of Satan” (ἀγγέλος σατάνα), the passive “given” (ἐδόθη), is most likely a “divine passive” indicating that this “thorn”, whatever it might have been, was something that ultimately had come from God.

It would seem that initially Paul did not recognise it as having been given by God for a purpose, as he three times pleaded with the Lord for it to be removed (12:8). Only when he had received a categorically negative reply (12:9a), did he realise its true purpose. Having come from God, the “thorn” was to keep him from becoming proud because of the exceptional revelation he had received. In fact he began and ended the statement regarding the thorn with the phrase ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραρώμαι (“so that I might not be proud”; 12:7b,d). Rather than the “thorn” being removed, it was to remain as a constant reminder that such revelations were a gift, not a right, and were based on the grace of God, not on Paul’s worthiness.

Unlike the “unutterable utterances” Paul heard when he was caught up to paradise (12:4), the Lord’s reply to his request that the “thorn” be removed was something that Paul openly shared (12:9a). In fact he repeated it verbatim: ἀρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου, ἡ γὰρ δύναμις ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελεῖται. This statement is usually translated: “My grace is sufficient for you; for my power is made perfect in

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1 There has been a huge amount of discussion about what the “thorn in the flesh” might have been. For an extensive discussion of the various conclusions that have been drawn see Thrall (2000, pp 809-818), Furnish (1984, pp 547-550), Martin (1986, pp 411-416), Barnett (1997, pp 568-571) and Harris (2005, pp 857-859) also discuss the various views. As discussed in chapter 2, the two most common views are that it was some sort of physical infirmity or that it was some form of opposition or persecution. There is insufficient evidence to make an absolute identification of what this “thorn in the flesh” might have been. For the argument in this work the existence of the “thorn in the flesh” is important, but its exact identification is immaterial. However, the view taken is that it was most likely some form of physical infirmity, but that some form of opposition or persecution cannot be excluded as a possibility.
weakness.” However, a more literal translation is: “My grace is sufficient for you; for power is brought to an end in weakness.” This raises the questions of why the more literal translation does not appear in any standard translation, and how the traditional understanding came to be.

The Textual Issues

Earlier manuscripts do not have the μου (“my”), although it is included in some later manuscripts and many English translations. Some manuscripts have τελειοῦται which is from the verb τελείοω (make perfect, make mature, fulfil, complete). However there is stronger support for τελεῖται, which is from the verb τελέω (finish, complete, end).

Most standard translations render the phrase “my power is made perfect in weakness”, or something similar, although some more recent translations omit the “my”.

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2 e.g. RSV, NIV, TNIV, similarly KJV.
3 Nestle-Aland (27th edition, 1993, p 459) lists the following manuscripts as omitting μου: B⁶⁴ and Ν*, Α*, Β, Δ*, Φ, Λ, ß, διαμ., and the following manuscripts as having it: Ν², Α⁴, Ν¹, Ψ, 0243, 0278, 33, 1739, 1881, δ, σ, διαμ., but opts to omit the μου in the text. Metzger (1994, p 517) comments, “The Textus Receptus, following Ν² Δ⁶⁴ E K L P most minuscules syr bo arm. reads ἡ γὰρ δύναμις μου. The possessive pronoun, which is absent from B⁶⁴ and Ν*, Α* B Δ* F G 424’ it⁶⁴ vg cop arm. was no doubt added by copyists for the sake of perspicuity.”
4 Nestle-Aland (27th edition, 1993, p 459) lists the following manuscripts as having τελεῖται: Ν*, Α, Β, Δ*, Φ, Γ; and the following manuscripts as having τελειοῦται: Ν², Δ², Ψ, 0243, 0278, 33, 1739, 1881, δ; but opts for τελεῖται in the text. In the second edition (1994), Metzger does not comment, but in the first edition (1971, p 586) he makes the following comment: “On the basis of external support (Ν* A B Δ* G 623) the Committee preferred τελεῖται to τελειοῦται (Ν* Δ⁴ E K L P almost all minuscules).” United Bible Societies (4th edition, 5th printing; 2001, original, 1993) notes the textual variant of the inclusion of μου, but does not note the textual variant of τελειοῦται for τελεῖται.
5 e.g. NEB, NJB, NAB, REB, NRSV.
6 The RSV, NIV, NKJV, CEV, NLT, ESV and TNIV all include the “my”.
comment on any textual issues.⁷ Some note that the “my” is not in the earlier manuscripts,⁸ but still interpret the phrase as if the “my” was there,⁹ sometimes arguing that it is implied.¹⁰ A few note that some manuscripts have τελειοῦσα rather than τελεῖται, but make no comment on the significance of this.¹¹ Exceptions to this are Lenski (1937, pp 1302-1306) and Dawn (2001, pp 37-41) who argue that the usual meaning of τελέω (“finished” or “ended”) is the one that is intended here.

Lenski opts for the translation: “For the power is brought to its finish in weakness”. He does, however, still argue that it is God’s power:

The verb used is τελεῖται, the very verb that is employed in John 19:28, 30 where Jesus cried: τετέλεσται, which our versions properly translate: “It is finished!” literally, “it has been and now is finished.” But in the case of our passage our versions translate the same verb with the present tense “is made perfect.” This sounds like a translation of τελειοῦσα, a different verb and an inferior variant reading. One must distinguish between the two verbs. … The sense of our passage is not, as our versions have it, the power “is made perfect,” comes to perfection only in the midst of weakness. The Lord says that divine power “is finished,” is brought to the end of its work in weakness. … We translate “the” and not “my” power although, as the next sentence shows, the Lord is speaking of his own power. The Lord’s power is certainly always τελειος, mature, complete, and it cannot be made perfect, for it is ever so. But this power has work to do. When it has brought us to the point were we are utter weakness, its task is finished (Lenski, 1937, pp 1304-1305).

Dawn follows Lenski in arguing that τελέω should be translated “to finish” or “to end” and not “to make perfect” as if it were τελειόω. However, she differs from

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⁸ Among those who note that the “my” is not in earlier manuscripts are Furnish (1984, p 530), Martin (1986, p 389), Barnett, 1997, p 566), Lambrecht (1999, p 203), and Thrall (2000, p 823).
⁹ Those who note that the “my” is not in earlier manuscripts, but interpret the phrase as if it was include Furnish (1984, pp 550-551), Barnett (1997, p 571) and Thrall (2000, pp 823-825).
¹⁰ Among those who argue that the “my” is implied are Martin (1986, pp 419-420) and Lambrecht (1999, pp 203-204).
¹¹ Martin (1986, p 389) and Thrall (2000, p 823) both note the textual variant, but make no comment on its significance.
Lenski in that she argues that “power” is intended to be a reference to Paul’s power and offers the following translation:

Three times I appealed to the Lord concerning this, that it might depart from me, but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for [your] power is brought to its end in weakness.” All the more gladly, then, will I boast in my weaknesses that the power of Christ [not mine!] may tabernacle upon me (Dawn, 2001, p 41).

Savage (1996, pp 63-64, 166-167) does not offer a translation as such, but does present an interpretation that is congruent with Dawn’s translation and interpretation:

Had Paul not been humbled by the thorn in the flesh he would have been tempted to boast of his divine visions as though they were his own achievement. He would have used them to exalt himself (the implication of ἵνα μὴ ὑπερείρωμαι, which appears twice in 12:7). But this would have amounted to denying God’s role as agent in the visions. Indeed it would have been tantamount to usurping that role for himself. On this basis, the power could hardly have been ‘of God’, but rather ‘of Paul’ (cf. εἰς ἡμῶν, in 4:7). In other words, where there is pride and arrogance there cannot, by definition, be divine power (1996, p 167).

The Meaning of τελέω and τελείω

There are three groups of meanings for τελέω (BDAG, 2000, pp 997b-998a):

(1) “to complete an activity or process, bring to an end, finish, complete”;

(2) “to carry out an obligation or demand, carry out, accomplish, perform, fulfil, keep”; and

(3) “to pay what is due, pay”.

BDAG include the occurrence in 2 Cor 12:9 in group (1), with the following translation for η ἰσχύς ἐν ἰσχυρότερῳ τελείται: “power finds its consummation or reaches perfection in (the presence of) weakness” (BDAG, 2000, p 997b). No explanation is given, however, as to why a meaning of “finds its consummation”
or “reaches perfection” should be included in the category of “bring to an end, finish, complete”. Neither is the possibility considered that in this occurrence, the word might have the usual meaning of this category.

The word τελείοω also has three groups of meanings (BDAG, 2000, pp 996a-996b):

(1) “to complete an activity, complete, bring to an end, finish, accomplish”;
(2) “to overcome or supplant an imperfect state of things by one that is free fr. objection, bring to an end, bring to its goal/accomplishment”, including meanings of “completion and perfection”, “bring to full measure, fill the measure of”, “fulfill”, “perfection of upright pers.”, and “made perfect”; and
(3) “As a term of mystery religions consecrate, initiate”.

As can be seen, there is significant overlap in meanings between the words τελέω and τελείοω. However, with the possible exception of 2 Cor 12:9, the meaning of “to perfect” appears to be limited to τελείοω. Thus, if 2 Cor 12:9 does indeed have the meaning of “made perfect”, it would appear that the verb τελέω has been used as if it were τελείοω. This raises the question of whether this phenomenon occurs anywhere else.

New Testament Use of τελέω

A study of the New Testament occurrences of both these verbs\(^\text{12}\) and other related words\(^\text{13}\) shows that all uses of τελέω (excluding for the moment 2 Cor 12:9)
clearly fit the three categories listed above with meanings of “end”, “finish”, “complete”, “accomplish”, “fulfil”, “perform”, “keep [commandments]” or “pay [taxes]”. There are no references where τέλεω is used with the meaning “to perfect”.

**Septuagint Use of τέλεω**

Study of the LXX shows that the only use of τέλεω that could mean “made perfect” is found in Wisdom 4:16. The REB translates νεότης τελεσθείσα ταχέως as “youth come quickly to perfection”, and the NRSV translates it as “youth that is quickly perfected”. However, the NRSV has a footnote indicating that τελεσθείσα could mean “ended”. As the phrase is contrasted with “prolonged old age”, “youth that is quickly ended” is at least as good a translation as “youth that is quickly perfected”, and is arguably superior.

In the LXX, the use of compounds of τέλεω is much more common than the use of τέλεω on its own. There are a number of different compounds, most of which are used in a manner that is almost identical to the use of τέλεω alone. There is only one example where a compound of τέλεω, in this case συντελέω, may be used as if

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12 In the LXX text in Rahlfs (BibleWorks 5.0), the occurrences of τελεω in the LXX are: Num 25:3, 5; Ruth 2:21, 3:18; 1 Esdr 8:65; Ezre 5:16; 6:15; 7:12; 9:1; 10:17; Neh 6:15; Jdt 8:34; Tob 7:9; 1 Macc 4:51; 13:10; 2 Macc 4:23; 3 Macc 5:27; Ps 105:28; Wis 4:16; Sir 7:25; 38:27; Dan 4:33; Hos 4:14.
it were τελειόω. This occurs in Ezek 16:14: καὶ ἐξήλθεν σου ὄνομα ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἐν τῷ κάλλει σου διότι συντελεσμένον ἦν ἐν εὐπρεπείᾳ (ʼAnd your name went out among the nations because it was perfected/accomplished/completed/ended(?) in beautyʼ). The general consensus of standard translations\textsuperscript{15} is for a meaning of “perfected” which reflects the MT ῥήλικ', “whole”, “entire”, “perfect”.

Consequently, there is no clear LXX use of τελέω with the meaning “perfect”. However, there is one use of a compound of τελέω that would seem to be used with this meaning.

\textit{Non-Biblical Use of τελέω}

Non-biblical use of τελέω includes use by Classical Greek writers and the Early Church Fathers. Liddell and Scott (\textsuperscript{9}1968, p 1772a) list five examples from Classical Greek writers of τελέω being used with the meaning “bring to fulfilment or perfection”, “bless him with perfect happiness” or “bring a child to maturity.” These are as follows:\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Including RSV, NEB, NIV, NAB, REB, NJB, NRSV, TNIV.
\textsuperscript{16} Greek text and English Translations are taken from the Perseus website \texttt{(http://www.perseus.tufts.edu)} accessed on 17\textsuperscript{th} November 2003. The dates for the writers come from \textit{Encyclopaedia Britannica 2005 Ultimate Reference Suite CD-ROM}. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pindar, Odes (Pi.N.4.43)</strong> (Born:518/522BCE; died after 446BCE, probably c. 438BCE)</td>
<td>As for me, I know that whatever excellence ruling destiny gave me, time will creep forward and bring it to its <strong>appointed perfection</strong>. Weave out, sweet lyre, right now, the beloved song with Lydian harmony… (Translation by Diane Arnson Svarlien)</td>
<td>“Bring to its appointed perfection” makes sense in this context, but it would seem that “bring to its appointed end” or “bring to its appointed completion” would equally make sense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pindar, Odes (Pi.I.6(5).46)</strong></td>
<td>… now with divine prayers, I entreat you to grant this man a brave son from Eriboea, a son fated to be my guest-friend. May he have a body as invulnerable as this skin that is now wrapped around me, from the beast whom I killed… (Translation by Diane Arnson Svarlien)</td>
<td>This translation appears to ignore the τελέσαι, unless “fated to be” represents “to complete/fulfil/accomplish what is destined”. This does not appear to have anything to do with “bring to perfection” and Liddell and Scott do acknowledge that it is dubious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pindar, Odes (Pi.N.9.6)</strong></td>
<td>There is a saying among men: a noble deed when it is accomplished should not be buried silently in the ground. (Translation by Diane Arnson Svarlien)</td>
<td>As the translation suggests, this fits well with a meaning of “ended/completed/accomplished”. A meaning of “made perfect” does not appear to fit the context well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aeschylus, Agamemnon (A.Ag.751)</strong> (Born 525/524BCE; died 456/455BCE)</td>
<td>A venerable utterance proclaimed of old has been fashioned among mankind: the prosperity of man, when it has come to full growth, engenders offspring and does not die childless, and from his good fortune there springs up insatiable misery. (Translation edited by Herbert Weir Smyth)</td>
<td>This use is possibly in the category of “made perfect” or “brought to maturity”. In favour of this is the question of how anything can engender offspring after it is ended. However, as the whole statement is metaphorical and the offspring referred to is misery, this could be engendered by the ending of prosperity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Euripides, Bacchae (E.Ba.100)</strong> (Born c. 485BCE; died 404BCE)</td>
<td>And he brought forth, when the Fates had perfected him, the bull-horned god, and he crowned him with crowns of snakes… (Translation edited by T.A. Buckley)</td>
<td>“Perfected”, as in this translation, fits the context. “Bring to birth” suggested by Liddell and Scott also fits the context. But “completed” would also make sense here.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data can be summarised as follows:

- In two cases (Pi.I.6(5).46 and Pi.N.9.6) a meaning of “to perfect” seems strained. A meaning of “ended/completed/accomplished” appears to fit the context better.

- In two cases (Pi.N.4.43 and E.Ba.100) a meaning of “to perfect” makes sense, but so does a meaning of “ended/completed”.

- In one case (A.Ag.751) a meaning of “to perfect” or “to bring to maturity” seems probable, but a meaning of “ended” is still possible.

When these five examples are examined, it is not clear that “to perfect” is necessarily the meaning intended by τελέω. Of the five references listed, all – except perhaps one – could have a meaning of “to perfect”, and perhaps one is likely to have that meaning. However, it appears that none absolutely require that meaning. A meaning of “complete”, “accomplish” or “end” is possible in each case. Thus, these do not form clear evidence either of τελέω having a meaning of “made perfect” or of τελέω being used with that meaning as if it were τελείω. At best, they only suggest that it may be possible.

Liddell and Scott (1968, p 1772a) also list several examples of τελέω being used with the meaning “to initiate” into the mystery religions, a usage that overlaps with a known usage of τελείω. This could perhaps be viewed as an example of τελέω being used as if it were τελείω, but it may also simply be a subset of the

17 The excerpt from the Liddell and Scott (1968, p 1772a) entry is as follows: “III. initiate in the mysteries, των Pl.Euthd.277d; τῇ μητρὶ τελοῦσα τὰς βίβλους ἄνευ θυσίας D.18.259; τιμπανίζειν καὶ τ. Plu.2.60a; τῷ Διονύσῳ Milet.6.23: – Pass., to have oneself initiated, Ar.Nu.258; τετελειμένος Pl.Phdr.69c, Berl.Sitzb.1927.169(Cyrene), etc.; τετελέως, ἤγῳ δ’ ἐτελούμεν D.18.265; Διονύσῳ τελευθήσατο to be consecrated to Dionysus, initiated in his mysteries, Hdt.4.79; ὄργυσαν Hp.Lex5, cf. X.Smp.1.110; ἢ ἀκ., Βασίλεα τετελεσθῇ Ar.Ra.357(anap.); τετελέος τελεσθά τετελεύμενος Pl.Phdr.249c, cf. 250b; also τ. μεγαλοισί τέλεοι Id.R.56e.”
significant area of overlap between the two words, although this is not listed in BDAG (2000, pp 997b-998a) as one of the categories of meaning for τελέω. In Classical Greek, then, it would seem that while τελέω being used as if it were τελείω with the meaning “make perfect” or “bring to maturity” is perhaps possible, it is at best an unusual usage.

The other area to consider for examples of the non-biblical usage of τελέω in this manner is that of the Early Church Fathers. Lampe (1961, p 1387a) gives four examples of Dionysius (c. 500CE) using τελέω with the meaning “perfect, make perfect” and gives references for a number of others.¹⁸ The ones he cites as examples are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>τάξις ἱεραρχίας ἐστι τὸ τοίς μὲν καθαίρεσθαι, τοῖς δὲ καθαίρεσθαι καὶ τοῖς μὲν φωτίζεσθαι, τοῖς δὲ φωτίζεσθαι καὶ τοῖς μὲν τελείσθαι τοὺς δὲ τελεσθεμένους</td>
<td>The succession/order/position of the high priest is on the one hand to be made pure, but on the other hand to make pure; and on the one hand to be enlightened and on the other hand to enlighten; and on the one hand to be completed/fulfilled/accomplished/perfected/rites performed/initiated, but on the other hand to perfect/accomplish/perform rites/initiate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>εἴ ἱεραρχικῶν μυστηρίων καὶ παραδόσεων τετελεμένους κατὰ τὰ θεῖα, καὶ θεοθήκαι</td>
<td>From the high priest of mysteries also transmission of traditions are perfected/completed/accomplished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τελεσθήραι κατὰ τὰ θεῖα, καὶ θεοθήκαι</td>
<td>to be completed/finished/accomplished/perfected/initiated according to …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>σωτηριώδεις … τελεταὶ τῶν τελεσθεμένων θέωσιν ἱερουργούσας</td>
<td>giving safety … rite of initiation of the one being initiated/completed/perfected might be set to perform the sacred rites</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the first example, given the parallel structure of the three clauses, τελείσθαι and τελεσθεμένους are obviously equivalent. The Perseus Word Study Tool

¹⁸ The excerpt from Lampe’s entry is as follows: “12. perfect, make perfect, Dion.Ar.e.h.3.1(M.3.164D); ib.3.2(165A); τάξις ἱεραρχίας ἐστι τὸ τοίς μὲν καθαίρεσθαι, τοῖς δὲ καθαίρεσθαι καὶ τοῖς μὲν φωτίζεσθαι, τοῖς δὲ φωτίζεσθαι καὶ τοῖς μὲν τελείσθαι, τοὺς δὲ τελεσθεμένους ib.(165B); ib.3.3(165D); ib.6.1(200C); ib.7.2(208C); εἴ ἱεραρχικῶν μυστηρίων καὶ παραδόσεων τετελεσθεμένων id.e.h.1.1(M.3.372A); ib.1.3(373C); ib.5.1.1(501A); ref. deification τελεσθήραι κατὰ τὰ θεῖα, καὶ θεοθήκαι ib.1.2(372D); σωτηριώδεις … τελεταὶ τῶν τελεσθεμένων θέωσιν ἱερουργούσας ib.3.3.7(436C); id.d.n.1.3(M.3.589C).”
(http://www.perseus.tufts.edu, accessed 30/11/2003) gives three possible morphological analyses for τελείοθαί; two from the verb τελέω and one from the verb τέλλω, for which Liddell and Scott (91968, p 1772b) give the meaning “accomplish, perform duties, rites”. For τελεσιονύμενων, the Perseus Word Study Tool gives a morphological analysis from the verb τελεσιονυμένω, for which Liddell and Scott (91968, p 1770b) give the following meanings: (1) “bring their young to perfection, of viviparous animals”; (2) “accomplish fully”; and (3) “initiate fully into a philosophical system”. Given the range of meanings of the possible verbs involved, the most likely meaning is “to be initiated … to initiate”. Thus if τελείοθαί is an occurrence of τελέω, and that is by no means certain, then this is more likely a use with the meaning “to initiate” rather than “to perfect”, although “to perfect” in the sense of bring to maturity within the religious order is possible.

With the short excerpts quoted in the second and third examples of the use of the verb τελέω, it is difficult to ascertain what the intended meaning may have been without knowledge of the larger context. A meaning of “perfected” is possible, but a meaning of “completed” or “accomplished”, and in the case of the third example “initiated”, are also possible.

The fourth example, like the first one, uses two words that inform the meaning of each other: τελεταί and τελομένων. The Perseus Word Study Tool indicates that τελεταί derives from the noun τελετή meaning “initiate in the mysteries” (electronic public domain version of Liddell and Scott accessed through Bible
Works 6.0). Like τελείσθαι, τελομένων could derive from either τελέω or τέλλω.

Consequently, the most likely context is again that of initiation.

These examples are all attributed to a mystical theologian (c. 500 CE), who has been called Dionysius, and whose writings combine Christianity and Neoplatonism. The following comment is made regarding Dionysius in the entry in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (1997, p 485):

> The aim of all Dionysius’ works is the union of the whole created order with God, which union is the final stage of a threefold process of purification, illumination, and perfection of union: a triad which has been vastly influential in the Christian mystical tradition.

This focus in Dionysius’ work means that a meaning “to perfect” is certainly possible, and perhaps even likely when he uses the verb τελέω. However, in the examples above, if he does indeed use τελέω as if it were τελείω, then it appears more likely that he does so with the meaning “to initiate” than the meaning “to perfect”.

**Conclusions regarding the possibility of τελέω being used as if it were τελείω**

In assessing how relevant these possible uses of τελέω as if it were τελείω are in determining Paul’s usage, there are two key questions. Firstly, how close in time are these uses to Paul? And, secondly, how familiar might Paul have been with them?

In the case of the examples from Classical Greek literature, they are all four to five centuries prior to Paul. As there do not appear to be any clear examples between these and Paul, and these are not unequivocal, it cannot be established that Paul would have used τελέω in the same way that Liddel and Scott suggest the
writers of these examples used the verb, or even that Paul was aware of this usage. In the case of the examples from Dionysius, they are four to five centuries after Paul. Clearly Paul’s usage was not affected by them, but they may have been affected by Paul’s usage, or at least by the understanding of Paul prevalent at the time. Thus, it is unlikely that these examples, either from Classical Greek literature or from Dionysius, have a high degree of influence on the way Paul’s use of τελέω should be understood.

The usage in the LXX is more likely to have impacted Paul. It is known that Paul was very familiar with the Jewish Scriptures, including the LXX, which he quoted on numerous occasions. There is debate as to when the book of Wisdom was written, but it seems likely that it was approximately contemporary with Paul. While there are some affinities between Paul’s writing and the book of Wisdom, it is more probable that “they arise from common concerns and values rather than literary dependency” (Kolarcik, 1997, p 440). If the use of τελέω in Wis 4:16 obviously had the meaning “perfected”, and it was certain that Paul was familiar with this work, this would be strong evidence that Paul may have used the word in that manner. However, with the ambiguity of meaning and the improbability that Paul was familiar with this work, the force of this evidence is significantly reduced. With the example in Ezek 16:14, it is much more probable that Paul was familiar with this statement, and this is the strongest evidence that Paul may have known of τελέω being used as if it were τελείω. In this case, συντελείω translates the MT לְתַהְמַלֵּך, which does include the meaning “to perfect”. Reducing the force of this evidence, however, is the fact that Ezek 16:14 has a compound of τελέω, not

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19 The Early Church Fathers’ understanding of Paul’s use of τελειώ in 2 Cor 12:9 will be discussed later in this chapter.
τελέω on its own, but this remains the strongest evidence in favour of τελέω having a meaning of “to perfect” or of being used as if it were τελείω with that meaning.

Nevertheless, the overwhelming evidence is that the standard meaning of τελέω is “ended, completed, finished”. While a meaning of “perfected” cannot be completely ruled out, it is at best a very unusual usage. If it is used in this way in 2 Cor 12:9, it is a unique usage within the New Testament. This raises the question: Why would Paul have used an unusual meaning of τελέω, or used τελέω as if it were τελείω, when he could have simply used τελείω if he had wished to convey the meaning “made perfect”?  

**Paul’s Use of τελείω**

Paul used the verb τελείω in Phil 3:12: Οὐχ ὅτι ἡδὲ ἐλαβόν ἡ ἡδὲ τετελείωμαι, “Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal” (NRSV), or “have already been made perfect” (NIV). In the undisputed Pauline epistles there are four occurrences of the related adjective, τέλειος, “complete, perfect, whole, mature” (1 Cor 2:6; 13:10; 14:20; Phil 3:15). If Ephesians and Colossians are regarded as Pauline, then there are an additional three occurrences of τέλειος (Eph 4:13; Col 1:28; 4:12), as well as one occurrence of the related noun τελειότης, “completeness, perfection, maturity” (Col 3:14). It is evident, then, that Paul was well aware of the verb τελείω and cognate words. The numerous uses of τελείω elsewhere in the NT suggest that this was a well-known and widely used word when the meaning “perfected” or “make perfect” was intended. If this
is the meaning Paul wished to convey in 2 Cor 12:9, \( \text{τελείωω} \) would have served his purpose well and would have been clearly understood by his readers.

However, assuming that the textual critics are correct in their judgement that \( \text{τελεῖται} \) (from \( \text{τελέω} \)), rather than \( \text{τελειοῦται} \) (from \( \text{τελείω} \)), is more likely to be original, then Paul chose to use \( \text{τελέω} \). It is reasonable to assume that the first readers of this letter would have understood this word with its common meaning “brought to an end”, rather than with the very rare meaning “made perfect”, particularly as there was another common word that would have given that meaning if it had been intended. This raises another question: If the common meaning of \( \text{τελέω} \), “ended, completed, finished”, was intended, how has the meaning “made perfect” come to be almost universally understood?

**History of the Interpretation “made perfect”**

It appears that in 2 Cor 12:9, no standard English translation has chosen the usual meaning of \( \text{τελεῖται} \), “brought to an end”. As already noted, with the exception of Lenski (1937) and Dawn (2001), commentators are united in interpreting this word as “made perfect”.

**Printed Greek Texts**

It would appear that this almost universal acceptance of “made perfect” is, at least in part, attributable to the history of printed Greek texts. The published Greek text of Erasmus (1535), Stephanus (1550), the English Hexapla ([1841]), Scrivener (1881) and the Robinson-Pierpoint Majority Text (1995), all have \( \text{γὰρ δύναμις} \) \( \text{μου ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ} \, \text{τελειοῦται} \). A translation of “my power is made perfect in
weakness” is a good translation of this text. It is from this text tradition that the early English translations, including the King James Version (1611), were made. The overwhelming dominance of the King James Version for most of the last four hundred years has meant that the translation adopted in that version has significantly impacted the vast majority of future translations and commentaries.

It was not until the latter part of the nineteenth century that printed Greek texts began to appear with the reading ʹἡ γὰρ δύναμις ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελείται. These include Tischendorf (8th edition, 1869-1872), Wescott and Hort (1881), and Nestle (1898), as well as the more recent Merk (9th edition, 1964), Tasker (1964), Nestle-Aland (27th edition, 1993) and United Bible Societies (4th edition, 1993, fifth printing 2001) texts. It should be further noted that printed texts that have τελείται usually omit the μου, while texts that have τελειοῦται usually include it.20 As can be seen from the textual notes in both Metzger and Nestle-Aland (see above), this tendency is also frequently reflected in the manuscripts.

Greek Manuscripts

It is unclear whether the change from τελείται to τελειοῦται and the addition of the μου occurred simultaneously or separately. The earliest manuscript evidence for the change to τελειοῦται and the inclusion of the μου is the second corrector to Σ (7th century) and the first (6th-7th century) and second (9th century) correctors of

20 An exception is the Hexaglot Bible (1872) that has ἥ γὰρ δύναμις [μου] ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελείται.
Most other manuscript evidence comes from the ninth and tenth centuries or later.

It is conceivable that the change to τελειοῦται was the result of a copying error and the addition of the μου came later as an explanation of τελειοῦται. There does not, however, appear to be any manuscript evidence for the changes having been made in this order.

It is also conceivable that δύναμις came to be understood as God’s power, causing the μου to be added as explanation or possibly to balance the μου in the first phrase. Having decided that it was God’s power, it would be difficult to consider how God’s power could be “brought to an end”. This, in turn, could give rise to the change in understanding, and thus to the text, to “make perfect”, τελειοῦται.

The manuscript D supports this order of changes, in that the first corrector added the μου in the 6th-7th century, while it was not until the 9th century that the second corrector made the change to τελειοῦται. However, the second corrector of Ξ made both changes in the 7th century, well before the second change was made to D. It is difficult to conceive of a reason for both changes happening at once unless one of two possible traditions already existed. One possibility is that τελείται was understood to mean “made perfect”, and that in this case it referred to God’s power. As has already been demonstrated, the use of τελέω elsewhere provides little support for this. The second possibility is that the word was understood as referring to God’s power and thus “brought to an end” was

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21 The original manuscripts (4th century for Ξ and 5-6th century for D) have τελείται and omit the μου. See textual notes by Nestle-Aland and Metzger cited above.
inappropriate, while “made perfect” could be appreciated as fitting with existing beliefs about the power of God. To determine which, if either, of these traditions already existed, it is necessary to consider the writings of the Early Church Fathers.

*Early Church Fathers*

Early Church Fathers\(^{22}\) including Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Achelaeus, Augustine and Chrysostom quoted 2 Cor 12:9. Many of these quotations are in the context of the writer addressing some other issue or some other passage of Scripture, and they refer to 2 Cor 12:9 only in support of their argument. This means it is not always apparent exactly how they understood the verse.

Chrysostom (c. 347-407 CE), however, is particularly helpful for three reasons. Firstly, he wrote in Greek, while a number of the others either wrote in Latin or their works have come down to us only in Latin versions. Secondly, he quoted the verse on at least fifteen occasions, so there is a significant amount of data to work from. And thirdly, on several occasions, he addressed the verse in the context of the passage, and in a number of works gave a significant amount of commentary on it. The result is that it is possible to gain an understanding of how he interpreted the verse.

Chrysostom’s understanding of this verse was that it is in the midst of human weakness, in particular, in the midst of persecution, that God’s power is most clearly demonstrated. This interpretation, which is very close to the traditional

\(^{22}\) See Roberts and Donaldson (1956 reprint of 1885 edition) and Schaff (1956 reprint of 1886 edition) for English translations of these works.
understanding of this verse, is summed up in his comments in *Concerning the Statues*, Homily 1:

... That this very particular also contributes much to **the showing forth of God’s power**, you may learn even from the same Apostle ... For having said, “There was given me a thorn in the flesh; a messenger of Satan to buffet me,” and having thus signified his repeated trials, he goes on to add, “For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me; and He said unto me, **My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is perfected in weakness.**” **“My power,”** He means, **“is seen then** when ye are in weakness; and yet through you, who seem to grow weak, the word preached is magnified, and is sown in all quarters.” ... With Peter too, and Paul himself, as well as the other disciples, one may see this occurring constantly; and in the midst of persecution, the grace of God ever flourishing, and appearing by the side of the tribulations, and thus **proclaiming His power.** Wherefore He saith, **“My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is perfected in weakness”** (Schaff, 1956, Vol 9, p 337, emphasis added).²³

In the case of biblical quotations, there is a tendency among copyists and translators to deliberately or inadvertently substitute text they are familiar with, for that actually in the works they are copying or translating.²⁴ Thus, while the text preserved in the works of Chrysostom is one that had τελειούσαν and included the μου,²⁵ it cannot be determined in any absolute sense whether this was the text Chrysostom had before him, although his interpretation does fit with this text. But what can be determined is that by the time of Chrysostom, only three hundred years after Paul, the understanding that 2 Cor 12:9 referred to God’s power being “perfected” in weakness, was already established.

²⁴ For example, biblical quotations in English translations of the Church Fathers bear a striking resemblance to the KJV, the English text that translators would have been most familiar with.
²⁵ In each occurrence of Chrysostom quoting 2 Cor 12:9 Migne has the text as: ἡ γὰρ δύναμις μου ἐν ἁθετικῷ τελειοῦσα, and Schaff has the translation “my strength is made perfect in weakness.”
Conclusions Regarding the History of the Interpretation

Evidence of the traditional interpretation of 2 Cor 12:9 goes back at least as far as Chrysostom (c. 347-407 CE). Evidence for the textual variant that best fits with the interpretation can only be traced back as far as the 6th-7th century. The fact that the interpretation goes back further, suggests that either the textual tradition goes back further but is no longer extant, or that the textual changes have been caused by the interpretive tradition. The evidence suggests the latter, but this cannot be determined with certainty.

The variant reading ἥ γὰρ δύναμις μου ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελειωταί has made its way into the early printed editions of the Greek text, and thus into early English translations. This, coupled with a long-standing interpretive tradition, has meant that both the translation “[my] power is made perfect in weakness” and the accompanying interpretation have become cemented in Christian belief. In fact, it would appear that they have become so ingrained, that even when a superior text became available, it has been almost impossible for translators to contemplate an alternative translation, or for commentators to contemplate an alternative interpretation.

Traditional Understanding: “My power is made perfect in weakness”

Traditionally, this verse has been regarded as comfort for those who are weak, either because of physical limitations (particularly if the “thorn in the flesh” is seen as some sort of physical affliction) or because of opposition or persecution (particularly if the “thorn in the flesh” is seen as opposition of some kind). It is in
the presence of such human weakness that divine strength is “perfected”, that is, demonstrated or shown for what it is. Black (1984b, p 87) sums it up like this:

This aspect of Paul’s understanding of weakness is expressed most profoundly in the famous statement of 2 Cor 12:9 that divine power finds its full scope in human weakness. This promise of the Lord, predicated upon his pronouncement, “My grace is sufficient for you,” is the vantage-point from which the whole of the Pauline motif can be seen in its proper perspective. Paul is well content with weaknesses, not because they are desirable in and of themselves, but because they are the vehicle through which the all-sufficient power of God becomes prominent. Human weakness paradoxically provides the best opportunity for divine power. It is this principle that makes weakness more meaningful to Paul than to his opponents. Whenever he feels himself to be weak – a fragile earthen vessel, persecuted, insulted, beset with afflictions of every kind – he feels Christ’s strength (emphasis original).

That “power” is God’s power in both instances in 2 Cor 12:9, is frequently accepted as being the case without reasons being given or alternatives being explored. If reasons are given at all, there are two that are cited. Both are to do with the balance of phrases in the verse.

Firstly, it is argued, “my grace is sufficient for you” balances “[my] power is made perfect in weakness” (Harris, 2005, p 863). Because the “my” is in the first phrase, it is implied, if not actually included, in the second phrase, although Kistemaker (1997, p 419) sees the “my” as balancing the “you” at the end of the first phrase. Also in the first phrase, being “sufficient” is seen as a parallel to being “made perfect in weakness” in the second phrase.

The parallel that is given the most attention is the parallel of “grace” and “power”. A number of commentators see this as stronger than a parallel and conclude that “grace” and “power” are synonymous. Thrall (2000, p 821) argues that “this

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Among those who argue for “grace” and “power” as synonyms are, Bultmann (1976, ET 1985, p 226), Harris (2005, p 863), Lambrecht (1999, p 203), Martin (1986, p 419), O’Collins (1971, p 528), and Watson (1993, p 135).
sentence shows that this χάρις is chiefly to be defined as divine power”. That there is a “close association” (Barnett, 1997, p 573) is made clear by a number of other passages (e.g. Eph 3:7-8; 2 Thess 1:11-12; 2 Peter 1:2-3), but it is less clear that there is precedent for regarding grace and power as synonyms. However, Best (1987, p 120) explains it like this:

Grace often means the favour with which God looks at us and forgives us though we are undeserving. But, linked as here to power, it is also often used for the strength God gives by which Christians are enabled to live as Christians.

Harris (2005, p 863) goes a little further and provides a possible basis for why grace and power could be regarded as synonyms:

Both denote divine gifts of enablement, the power for Paul to fulfil his apostolic calling of service and suffering (4:7; 6:7; 13:4; 1 Cor 15:10). What is more, both are renewable endowments, not once-for-all acquisitions; the constancy of the supply of χάρις and δύναμις is implied by the presents ἀρκεῖ and τελείται.

The second aspect of balance is given by “[my] power” in the phrase “[my] power is made perfect in weakness” and “the power of Christ” in the phrase “so that the power of Christ may dwell on me” at the end of the verse. It is argued that because it is the “power of Christ” in the latter part of the verse, “power” in the first part of the verse must also be Christ’s power. This is certainly possible, but insisting that the two uses of the word “power” must be referring to power from the same source excludes from consideration the possibility that a contrast between two different sources of power might be what was intended.

In the traditional view then, Paul could boast in his weaknesses because it was in such weaknesses that the power of God was most clearly demonstrated. So, he concluded, “When I am weak, then I am strong.” In the midst of Paul’s weakness,
and thus in the midst of the weakness of every believer, is demonstrated true
strength, strength that is in fact the power of God. As Harris (2005, p 864)
summarises:

It is “in the midst of weakness” that Christ’s power reaches its plenitude;
“weakness” is the sphere where his power is revealed. It is precisely when
or whenever (ὁταν) Paul is weak that he experiences Christ’s power (v. 10b).

This interpretation is one that has been a source of comfort and encouragement for
countless Christians over many centuries. As such it cannot and should not be
discounted lightly or quickly. However, I believe the textual evidence requires
that an alternative translation, and thus an alternative interpretation, must at least
be considered.

Alternative Understanding: “Power is brought to an end in weakness”

In considering whether a more literal translation of ἡ γὰρ δύναμις ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ
teleïta, that is, “for power is brought to an end in weakness”, is a better
translation than the traditional one, there are a number of issues to be considered.
• Is it a valid translation of the best Greek text available?
• Does it make sense in the immediate context?
• Does it make sense in the wider context of the Corinthian correspondence?
• Does it make sense in the wider context of the New Testament?27

It has already been demonstrated that “brought to an end” is a more natural
translation of τελείται than “made perfect” is. Additionally, textual critics are
agreed that ἡ γὰρ δύναμις ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελείται is most likely the original

27 The third and fourth questions will be further addressed in subsequent chapters.
reading. “Power is brought to an end in weakness”, is clearly a good translation of the superior Greek text, but it remains to be seen whether this translation makes sense both in the immediate and wider contexts.

Context of 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Frequently the traditional interpretation is understood in general terms and is not closely tied to Paul’s recounting of the extraordinary revelation and the subsequent thorn in the flesh. The phrase ἡ γὰρ δύναμις ἐν ἁσθενείᾳ τελεῖται does have a general, proverbial form. As Windisch (1924, p 391, cited in Thrall, 2000, p 823) comments, “the present tense of the verb and the unqualified δύναμις give it the character of a gnomic utterance of universal validity”. For Zmijewski (1978, pp 382-382, cited in Thrall, 2000, p 823) the unqualified δύναμις is primarily a reference to the power of God and the singular ἁσθενεία denotes “the totality of earthly-human existence in its weakness”. However, it is unlikely that the phrase represents an already existing piece of “everyday wisdom” for as Heckel (1993, p 91, cited in Thrall, 2000, p 823) points out, if it did the Corinthians would not have had such a problem with Paul’s weakness. While the phrase ἡ γὰρ δύναμις ἐν ἁσθενείᾳ τελεῖται does have a generalised form and thus, it can be argued, a generalised application, the context suggests that Paul had his own specific situation in mind. The statement is followed by a reference to “weaknesses” (plural) as well as “insults, distresses, persecutions and difficulties” (12:9b-10a), which, while generalising, does suggest that Paul had particular instances of these events in mind. And it is preceded by the very specific account of the “thorn in the flesh”. Thus, the interpretation of the Lord’s statement in 12:9a needs to be interpreted in the light of the immediate context.
Paul began this section by recounting an experience from fourteen years earlier when he had been caught up into paradise and given an outstanding revelation. As a result of this vision he had received a “thorn in the flesh” to stop him from becoming proud. Three times he had prayed for its removal, but the reply he had received from the Lord was, “My grace is sufficient for you. Power is brought to an end in weakness.”

The nature of the revelation meant that it would have been possible, perhaps even probable, that Paul would have become proud, that he would have equated the outstanding nature of the revelation with his qualification, even right, to be an apostle. His qualifications, his experiences, in essence his own power, could have become the basis of his apostleship. It was to stop this that the “thorn in the flesh” was given. It was to be a constant reminder of his dependence on God, a constant reminder that his apostleship, his ministry, was not the result of his own power, but rather the result of God’s power.

In the weakness of the “thorn in the flesh”, Paul’s power was brought to an end. “Therefore,” he said, “I prefer to gladly boast in my weaknesses [rather than in the extraordinary visions], so that Christ’s power will take up residence in me.” It was the weaknesses he suffered that brought him to the place of realising that his own power was inadequate, and of letting go of that power and his reliance on it. When his power had been brought to an end through weakness, he was in a position to be engulfed by Christ’s power. The result was that when he was weak, when he had let go of his own power, he was in fact strong, not because God had
reinforced his strength, but because his strength, his power, had been replaced by God’s power.

**Context of 2 Corinthians 10-13**

Throughout 2 Corinthians 10-13, Paul was replying to the accusation that he was a “weak” apostle. The newcomers in Corinth who were happy to own the title “apostle” presented the Corinthians with an alternate model of apostleship, an apostleship that was strong, eloquent, boastful and forceful. This model of apostleship fitted better with the Corinthians’ culturally conditioned expectations, and by comparison, Paul’s model of apostleship was at best inferior, and possibly even invalid. It is in addressing this situation that Paul discussed his exceptional vision and subsequent “thorn in the flesh”, and then reported the Lord’s statement, “My grace is sufficient for you; for power is brought to an end in weakness.”

While this verse has been an encouragement to many who know themselves to be weak, who are facing difficult times and feel they are inadequate to the task, Paul was not writing to people who saw themselves in that situation. He was writing to people who valued power and were criticising him for not demonstrating the sort of power they thought he, as an apostle, should have.

Far from Paul intending to provide comfort for weak people, he intended to answer and to challenge people who thought they were strong and who valued those who demonstrated power. This was the situation Paul was addressing when he informed the Corinthians of the Lord’s statement, “Power is brought to an end in weakness.” The power displayed by the “false apostles” was not true power.
Rather it was in the weaknesses that Paul displayed that true power was to be found, because it was those weaknesses that caused the apostle to realise that his own power was of no account. It was in those weaknesses that his power was brought to an end. Then true power, the power of Christ, the power Christ demonstrated in the resurrection (13:4), was able to come upon his life.

Context of the Corinthian correspondence

A key to understanding 2 Cor 12:9 is 2 Cor 4:7: “But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that the extraordinary power might be of God and not originate with us.”

It is common for translations to add to the phrase “the extraordinary power of God”, words such as “to show that it is” or “to prove that it is”. Adding these words interprets the verse as meaning that the power Paul speaks of here is inherently God’s power, and the fact that the treasure is contained in clay jars simply demonstrates this fact. This fits with the traditional understanding of 12:9 where God’s power is made perfect or demonstrated in the presence of weakness. However, a more literal translation of ἵνα ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως ἢ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ μὴ ἡ ἡμῶν, “so that the extraordinary power might be of God, and not from us”, raises the possibility that the power could come from us. There is a real possibility that ministry could be endeavoured in our own strength. The reason we “have this treasure in clay jars” is so that it will actually be God’s power and not ours. It is human “weakness”, the weakness of the “clay jars” of our lives, which ensures it is God’s power and not human power. Translated and understood this way, this verse fits with the alternative interpretation of 12:9. In both cases human power is contrasted with divine power; it is through human
weakness that human power is brought to an end and Christian life and ministry become the result of divine power.\textsuperscript{28}

This contrast is also demonstrated in 2 Corinthians 3:4-7:

\begin{quote}
Such is the confidence we have through Christ towards God. \textit{Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God}, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant…
\end{quote}

Here “competence”, which can be seen as a parallel to “power”, is described as coming “from God” and not being “of ourselves”. Again the possibility that a person could function from their own competency is raised. The competency for ministry, however, must come from God.\textsuperscript{29}

This principle is unmistakably expressed in 2 Cor 1:9 where Paul explained the reason for an “affliction” from which he felt there was no escape, in which he despaired of life itself. It was so that “we might not rely on ourselves, but rely on God who raises the dead”. This “affliction” (1:9) functions in the same way as the “thorn in the flesh” (12:7), that is, to bring Paul’s power and resources to an end and to force him to give up his illusion of self-sufficiency and to allow Christ’s power to take up residence in him (12:9) and rely on the “God who raises the dead” (1:9).\textsuperscript{30}

The theological underpinning for Paul’s understanding of weakness bringing human power to an end, and thus allowing divine power freedom of operation, was the death and resurrection of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5 Paul had

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{28} This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7.
\textsuperscript{29} This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6.
\textsuperscript{30} This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.
\end{footnotes}
expounded the principle that the cross of Christ, apparently weak and foolish, was in fact power and wisdom “so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom, but on the power of God” (2:5). He came back to this in 2 Corinthians 13:3b-4:

He [Christ] is not weak in his dealings with you, but is powerful in you. For indeed he was crucified as a result of weakness, but lives as a result of God’s power. So we also, in our dealings with you, share in his weakness, but we will live with him as a result of God’s power.

The example of Christ “crucified as a result of weakness”, but living “as a result of God’s power”, was Paul’s paradigm for Christian ministry. In his dealings with the Corinthians, he would share in Christ’s weakness, such weakness being at least inclusive of, if not a specific reference to, the “thorn in the flesh”. But he would also live with Christ as a result of God’s power. His ministry among the Corinthians would be conducted in God’s power, not his own.

Context of the New Testament

The concept of ministry being in God’s power not human power is not limited to the Corinthian correspondence. Paul’s other letters demonstrate that it was a governing principle for him. Writing to the Galatians he said, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God” (2:19-20). It was not in his own strength that he lived the Christian life; it was Christ living in him.

In his letter to the Romans (8:26-27), he stated that while human weakness means we do not know how to pray, yet the Spirit prays on our behalf. Again, here is an example of the power of God, this time through the Spirit and in the realm of prayer, taking over when human effort is inadequate.
But this concept is not limited to Paul. A similar concept is found in Jesus’ words, “Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all” (Mark 10:43-44). This saying, or a very similar one, is recorded in several different settings (cf. Matt 20:25-28; 23:11-2; Mark 9:35; Luke 22:25-27). As with Paul, the underlying reason is the death of Jesus: “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Jesus also said, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it” (Matt 16:24-25; cf. Mark 8:34-35; Luke 9:23-24). The losing of one’s life, the ultimate giving up of human power, for the sake of Christ, ultimately results not in death, but in life.

Similarly, the image of branches “abiding” in the vine (John 15), as well as Jesus’ example of dependence on his Father is congruent with Paul’s conception of ministry as a result of God’s power, not human power.  

**Conclusion Regarding the Alternative Translation and Interpretation**

It is clear that the translation “power is brought to an end in weakness” is a good translation of the superior Greek text ἡ γὰρ δύναμις ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελεῖται. The interpretation that in weakness human power is brought to an end, thus enabling Christian life and ministry to be in God’s power rather than in human strength, fits

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31 This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 9.
with the context of 2 Cor 12:1-10. It can also be demonstrated that this interpretation fits with the context of the Corinthian correspondence as a whole and with the wider context of the New Testament. For these reasons, I believe that this translation and thus this interpretation must be seriously considered.

**Conclusion**

In both the traditional interpretation of 2 Cor 12.9 and the alternative interpretation offered here, Christian life and ministry are to be in God’s power not in human power. The difference in the two interpretations lies in who the statement is addressed to and in the extent of the application.

The traditional interpretation sees God’s power as being most clearly demonstrated in the presence of human weakness. Inherent in this interpretation, though usually not explicitly stated, is that God’s power can be seen as a sort of supplement to human power. When human strength is insufficient, then God’s power intervenes and is more clearly seen.

The alternative interpretation views human weakness as the means through which human power is brought to an end. Instead of supplementing human power, God’s power replaces it. It is when – with the catalyst of weakness – the illusion of self-sufficiency is let go, that God’s sufficiency, God’s power, takes over. It is through weakness that people are brought to the place of being able to learn not to rely on themselves, but to rely on God.
Harris (2005, p 864), who argues from the traditional interpretation, makes the following statement with regard to 2 Cor 12:9:

We conclude that \textit{avsqe,neia} is both a prerequisite and a concomitant of Christ’s power. His enabling strength cannot operate without a prior confession of weakness and need. If self-sufficiency is claimed, his power will be neither sought nor experienced. But if weakness is recognized, his power will be sought and granted. Then it will operate at the same time as the weakness and find unhindered scope in the presence of that weakness. “My risen power finds its full scope and potency in your acknowledged weakness.”

He comes to a conclusion very similar to the alternative interpretation put forward here. It is in “acknowledged weakness” that Christ’s power “finds its full scope and potency”. Where the two interpretations differ is that the alternative interpretation includes the step of human power being brought to an end through the agency of weakness, through “acknowledged weakness”. This is not explicit in the traditional interpretation, though it is implied in Harris’s presentation of that interpretation.

Primarily, this passage was addressed to people who were strong, or at least who thought they were, and who valued power and demonstrations of power on the part of leaders. The challenge for them was to consider the example of Christ. Without the weakness of the cross there could not have been the power of the resurrection. For those who would follow Christ now as then, it is in weakness that human power is left behind and divine power comes into operation, that reliance on God rather than on one’s own resources becomes possible.

In the past this passage has certainly been an enormous comfort and encouragement to people who are “weak” in a variety of ways: who live with physical limitations, who face difficult situations beyond their control, who are
persecuted for their faith, or who contemplate ministry situations for which they feel inadequate, just to name a few. And it should continue to provide such comfort and encouragement, for it is in those weaknesses that human power is brought to an end and the power of God comes into operation. But even more than being comfort for the weak, this passage is a challenge to the strong and powerful, for the path of strength and power is not the path that Christ took, nor the path that he calls his followers to take. Paul would make this connexion explicit in 13:4 where the fact that Jesus was “crucified as a result of weakness” but was “raised as a result of God’s power” was the paradigm on which he based his interaction with the Corinthians.
Chapter 5

Relying on God who Raises the Dead

2 Corinthians 1:3-11

Background

In 1 Corinthians there were already hints that at least some within the congregation were unhappy with the way Paul demonstrated apostleship and were questioning the validity of that apostleship (1 Corinthians 9). By the time Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, that questioning had escalated.

A key issue was how Paul could possibly be a genuine apostle when he underwent so much suffering and persecution. Surely if he were an apostle of Jesus Christ he would be above such things; would have “victory” over such things; would display God’s glory in his life. This questioning of his apostleship was intensified by questions about his reliability. He had promised to visit and had changed his plans, writing a harsh letter instead. Would a genuine apostle do such a thing? Would not a genuine apostle keep his promises?

In a variety of ways throughout 2 Corinthians, Paul dealt with this issue of his genuineness as an apostle. While his opening for both Corinthian letters followed the usual pattern in the ancient world generally and in particular for his letters to churches, the opening of 2 Corinthians immediately highlighted the issue of the nature of his apostleship. Paul usually expanded the standard letter opening, but here there is very little expansion. Belleville (1991, pp 106-107) comments that it
is “nearly severe in its brevity” and that the “standardized phraseology communicates a sense of formality and remoteness”. Right from the start, there is an indication that the relationship between Paul and the Corinthian congregation is strained. Within this brief opening, he introduces himself as “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God’s will”. The source of his apostleship is God. It was not based on any merit of his, nor simply on a decision he had made. This encapsulates a core issue of the letter, that of his legitimacy as an apostle.

**Benediction: Suffering and Comfort**

After the initial greeting Paul launched into a benediction in praise of “the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our distress”. Far from affliction disqualifying him from being an apostle, it was, in fact, a demonstration of his apostleship. For when he was afflicted, he received God’s comfort, and both were for the benefit of the Corinthians.

It was common for Paul to include a thanksgiving and/or prayer at this point in his letters. However, this benediction is unusual in a number of ways. Instead of using the usual εὐχαριστέω-formula, he uses a εὐλογεῖσε-formula. Instead of thanking God for those to whom he was writing and for what God had done for them, he blesses God for comfort he himself had received. Even when a note of thanksgiving and prayer is introduced (1:11), it is not to give thanks for the Corinthians, nor to pray for them. Rather, it is to request that they pray for him,

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¹ Even in 1 Corinthians where Paul was dealing with a variety of problems in the Church, including problems with the use of spiritual gifts, Paul gave thanks for the way God had enriched them in “speech and knowledge” (1 Cor 1:5).
with the result that many will give thanks for what God had done for him. Again, this drew attention to the issue at hand: the strained relationship between Paul and the Corinthians, and their resultant estimation of Paul’s apostleship.

In 2 Cor 1:3 Paul gave two designations for God: ὁ πατὴρ τῶν οἴκτυρμῶν, “the Father of mercies/compassion” and θεός πάσης παρακλήσεως, “the God of all comfort/consolation/encouragement”. The “God of mercies” is a description of God found in synagogue prayers and God as “comforter” of his people is common in the OT (Barnett, 1997, pp 69-70; Martin, 1986, pp 8-9). God is a God who shows mercy and gives comfort to his people. But mercy, compassion, comfort, encouragement are unnecessary if there is no suffering. Inherent in these descriptions of God is the fact that his people suffer.

Paul went on to elaborate on the relationship between suffering (πάθημα) or affliction (θλίψις) and comfort or encouragement (παρακλησία/παρακαλέω). These two concepts were key ones for Paul, not only in the immediate context, but throughout his writings to the Corinthian church. In the distress and suffering that came Paul’s way, he received God’s comfort, which, in turn, enabled him to comfort others. As Martin (1986, p 9) notes, the “εἰς τό + infinitive (δύναμθαι), ‘so that we can’ (1:4), may indicate either purpose or result, probably the latter.

2 The noun παρακλησία (comfort, consolation, encouragement, exhortation) occurs 6 times in this passage (1:3, 4, 5, 6[2x], 7) and a further six times in the Corinthian correspondence (1 Cor 14:3; 2 Cor 7:4, 7, 13; 8:4, 17); while the related verb παρακαλέω (to encourage, comfort, console, exhort) occurs four times in this passage (1:4[3x], 6) and a further twenty times in the Corinthian correspondence (1 Cor 1:10; 4:13, 16; 14:31; 16:12, 15; 2 Cor 2:7, 8; 5:20; 6:1; 7:6[2x], 7, 13; 8:6; 9:5; 10:1; 12:8, 18; 13:11), though not always with the same nuance as here. The noun θλίψις (trouble, distress, suffering) occurs three times in this passage (1:4[2x], 8) and a further six times in the Corinthian correspondence (1 Cor 7:28; 2 Cor 2:4; 6:4; 7:4; 8:2, 13); while the noun πάθημα (suffering) occurs three times in this passage (2 Cor 1:5, 6, 7), and the related verb πάθεω occurs once in this passage (2 Cor 1:6) and once elsewhere in the Corinthian correspondence (1 Cor 12:26).
here.” It may be that the purpose in affliction was to receive God’s comfort and then pass that comfort on to others. On the other hand, given that later (in 1:9) Paul would give another reason for affliction, or at least for the particular affliction he described in that passage, it seems more likely that the ability to comfort others with the comfort received from God was a result of affliction rather than the purpose of it.

But Paul went even further. Not only did suffering enable him to receive God’s comfort and to comfort others, he described the suffering he went through as “the sufferings of Christ” (τὰ παθήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 1:5), which along with the comfort “overflowed” (περισσέω) to him. Both the suffering and the comfort were a part of being a follower of Jesus, part of being an apostle of Christ. Again there is a reminder that suffering does not make his apostleship invalid. On the contrary, his suffering is a sharing in Christ’s suffering that is integral to Christian experience. Identifying with Christ includes identifying with his suffering. As Watson (1993, pp 4-5) puts it:

It is one of Paul’s most strongly held convictions, expressed particularly clearly in this letter, that Christian existence is stamped with the pattern of Christ’s dying and rising. This is true not only of baptism but of the life of discipleship from start to finish. … This way of speaking might be taken to mean that believers undergo a dying and rising analogous to that of Christ, but Paul seems to have in mind a closer bond than this. We suffer not simply like him but with him, and he suffers with us. And, as we suffer with him, we also experience his consolation and begin to know the power of his risen life (emphasis original).

3 There is much discussion about what the phrase τὰ παθήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ (“the sufferings of Christ/Messiah”) might mean. If it is to be interpreted as “the sufferings of the Messiah”, it refers to the widespread belief that suffering would precede the coming of the Messianic kingdom. But this does not seem to fit the context of this passage. As Grayston (1990, p 52) concludes, “No doubt Paul had the suffering and shocking disgrace of crucifixion in mind, the exclusion of Jesus from the company of the godly (‘He made him to be sin’, 2 Cor 5:21), and the rejection of his work by Israel. But the aptness of the phrase in this context arises from the sufferings of Paul and the community: it means the sufferings of those who are members of Christ’s body and belong to Christ.”
The overflowing of comfort is only possible because of the overflowing of suffering. The pairing of “suffering” and “comfort” is a reflection of the pairing of “death” and “resurrection”, a pairing that is seen both implicitly and explicitly (cf. 2:14-16; 4:7-12; 5:15; 8:9; 12:7-10; 13:3-4) throughout this letter (Barnett, 1997, p 75). In particular, it is most evident in 13:4 where Paul explicitly set out his paradigm for ministry:

For indeed he [Christ] was crucified as a result of weakness, but he lives as a result of God’s power. So we also, in our dealings with you, share in his weakness, but we will live with him as a result of God’s power.

With Paul’s elaboration in 1:6, the reality of both suffering and comfort are assumed. Most standard translations opt to translate the εἰςτε… εἰςτε…, as “if we are afflicted… if we are comforted…” However, the εἰςτε… εἰςτε…, coupled with the present tense θλιβόμεθα (“we are afflicted”) and παρακαλοῦμεθα (“we are comforted”), have a meaning that is closer to “when we are afflicted… when we are comforted…” (Furnish, 1984, pp 110-111). That both will occur is implicit.

Both Paul’s affliction and his comfort led to comfort and salvation for the Corinthians (1:6). It was in the context of Paul’s suffering that they heard and believed the gospel. What they despised was, in fact, part of what had brought them salvation (Barnett, 1997, p 77; Thrall, 1994, pp 110-111).

The principle that Paul had expounded in relation to himself also applied to the Corinthians, for they, too, would share both in the suffering and the comfort (1:6-7). And Paul was confident that this would result in “patient endurance”
(ὑπομονή, 1:6); that they, too, would conform to the pattern of Christ’s death and resurrection.

Thus, through the opening benediction Paul provided the theological basis for a defence of suffering and affliction as part of his apostolic ministry, much as he would do later in the conclusion of the letter. The Corinthians had questioned his authenticity because of his suffering; so, having set the scene, as it were, Paul went on not only to give an example of God working through his suffering, he went on to give an extreme example. While in Asia he had experienced an affliction where he had despaired even of life, but “God who raises the dead” had rescued him.

The “Affliction in Asia”

Identification of the “Affliction”

There is much discussion about what this affliction may have been. Paul’s description is tantalisingly brief and raises four main questions:

- Did the Corinthians already know about this event, or was it news to them?
- Where did this “affliction” happen?
- What is the significance of the phrase “death sentence”?
- What was the “affliction”?
The Corinthians' Knowledge

The opening phrase, “For we do not want you to be ignorant…” (οὐ γὰρ θέλομεν ὑμᾶς ἐγνοεῖν…, 1:8) is a conventional phrase in ancient letters and is well attested as an introductory formula when introducing new information (Furnish, 1984, p 112). This suggests that the Corinthians did not already know of this experience. However, the fact that Paul gives so little information about details of the experience, along with the use of the definite article (τὴν θλίψιν), might suggest that the Corinthians did already know about it. But the use of the definite article can be explained by the fact that γενομένη also has a definite article (Thrall, 1994, p 114), and besides, this is not the only time Paul gave tantalisingly little information about personal experiences (cf. 2 Cor 12:1-9).

The data is inconclusive. The balance is probably in favour of the Corinthians not knowing about this “affliction”, particularly as it would seem to be a recent experience, but it is possible that they did know of the event, though were unaware of its severity.

Location of the “Affliction”

Paul locates it “in Asia” (ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, 1:8), but such a designation covers the whole of the Roman province of Asia. Traditionally, it has been identified as occurring in the provincial capital, Ephesus. This is partly due to conclusions regarding the nature of the affliction, which some identify with events that happened in Ephesus. It is also partly due to the fact that we know that Paul spent a significant amount of time in Ephesus, but have no specific information about him ministering elsewhere in the province. Counter to this is the fact that in
1 Corinthians (15:32; 16:8) Paul specifically identified Ephesus, which raises the question of why he did not do so here, if in fact he was referring to an event in Ephesus.

Again, the data is inconclusive. The experience may well have occurred in Ephesus as that would be included in the designation “in Asia”. But just as easily, it may have occurred somewhere else in the province, such as on the journey from Ephesus to Troas, in Troas itself, or even on some other journey that is not elsewhere recorded. While any location within the province of Asia is possible, given that the most likely time frame for the occurrence of this experience is between the writing of 1 Corinthians and the writing of 2 Corinthians, a location of Ephesus, or Troas, or on the road between the two, is the most likely.

**Significance of “Death Sentence”**

It is common for standard translations to translate τὸ ἀπόκριμα τοῦ θανάτου (1:9) as “sentence of death” or “death sentence”; however the exact meaning of the phrase is much disputed. The word ἀπόκριμα “became a technical term for an official decision in answer to the petition of an embassy” (Hemer, 1972, p 104). Such a response could just as easily be positive as negative, so it is not clear that the traditional interpretation of a judicial death sentence is appropriate. Some understand this as a verdict received from God that Paul would not live to see the Parousia, but it is difficult to see how this fits with the context of the passage, particularly as on this occasion God did rescue him. It is also possible that the

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4 Harvey (1996, pp 1-31), among others, argues this way.

5 This is pointed out by both Martin (1986, p 15) and Thrall (1995, p 118).
“answer” was an inward one; it was Paul’s own assessment of the situation.\textsuperscript{6} As Thrall (1994, p 118) concludes, “whatever the usual technical sense of \textit{ἀπόκριμα}, the fact that it is here qualified by \textit{θανάτου} might suggest that the meaning approximates very closely to ‘death-sentence’\textsuperscript{.7} This would apply whether the “death sentence” was an official verdict of the authorities, or whether it was Paul’s own estimation of his chances of survival.

\textit{The Nature of the “Affliction”}

It is against this very uncertain background, that the quest to determine the nature of the “affliction in Asia” is carried out. There are basically three groups of alternatives: (1) it was an extreme form of spiritual and/or emotional anguish; (2) it was a severe illness; or (3) it was some form of severe persecution.

\textit{Spiritual and/or Emotional Anguish}

The first option, that it was severe spiritual anguish or depression, is perhaps the least likely, even though there is evidence supporting the claim that Paul did suffer from spiritual anguish. When Paul arrived in Troas he was unable to engage in ministry even though “a door was opened” because his “mind could not rest” because Titus had not arrived (2 Cor 2:12-13). And in 2 Cor 11:28 he spoke of the “daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches”. But it is unlikely that such concerns would have been as life-threatening as 2 Cor 1:8-9 suggests. And in 2 Cor 7:5-7, where Paul admits that he was afflicted with “fears within”, which were at least in part due to his concern over the Corinthian church,

\textsuperscript{6} This is the explanation that Lambrecht (1999, p 21) gives, and is also noted by Thrall (1994, p 118).
\textsuperscript{7} Barrett (1973, p 65) also argues that “\textit{sentence} is the right translation in this context”. 
he also notes that there were “conflicts without” and that “our bodies had no rest”.
These two phrases would seem to include external and physical conditions, not simply emotional turmoil. Additionally, the aorist participle γενομένης (happening) in 1:8 suggests not a state of mind, but rather an event (Thrall, 1994, p 115).

Severe Illness

The second option, that it was a severe illness, is more likely, and a number of commentators either draw this conclusion or at least acknowledge it as a possibility. In favour of this interpretation is the fact that elsewhere there are indications that Paul suffered from illness, possibly chronic illness. Paul notes that it was because of a “physical infirmity” (NRSV) that he first proclaimed the gospel to the Galatians (Gal 4:13). The “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor 12:7) may also be a reference to a recurring illness, as may the phrase “our bodies had no rest” (2 Cor 7:5). Also, the phrase ἐν ἑαυτοῖς (in ourselves, 1:9) may indicate that this affliction had an inward character, suggesting an illness. Paul’s request that the Corinthians pray for him and his confidence that God would continue to rescue him (1:10-11) suggests that Paul expected to undergo a similar affliction in the future, which would be congruent with a recurrent illness. Additionally, the reference to “God who raises the dead” has OT precedent for connection with divine intervention in situations of severe illness (Prümm, cited in Thrall, 1994, p 115).

8 Allo (cited in Hughes 1962, pp 19-20) argues for the affliction being a severe illness, as does Harris (2005, pp 170-171). Others, such as Barrett (1973, p 64), Hughes (1962, pp19-20), Thrall (1994:115-116), and Watson (1993, p 6) consider it as a possibility.
9 Harris (2005, pp 171-172) follows Alexander in arguing that it is an illness and that the three times Paul asked for the “thorn” to be removed were (a) in Cilicia on the occasion of receiving the vision (2 Cor 12:1-9); (b) in Pisidian Antioch on the occasion his first proclaiming the gospel in Galatia (Gal 4:13; cf. Acts 13:13-14); and (c) in Troas (2 Cor 1:8; 2:13-14; 7:5).
However, in this passage, this affliction comes under the category of “the sufferings of Christ” (1:5). As illness can equally afflict Christians and non-Christians alike, it is not certain that illness would be so categorised, unless it was an illness specifically caused by Paul’s apostolic ministry. This is certainly possible as the “thorn in the flesh”, if an illness, would fit this category.

However, the nature of the “thorn in the flesh” is by no means certain, and although it is likely to have been a physical ailment of some kind, there remains the possibility of it being some form of persecution. Additionally, instead of referring to the inward character of the affliction, the ἐν ἐαυτῷ is perhaps more likely to refer to the inward character of the assessment of the “death sentence”, that is, Paul’s realisation that in his own strength he had no chance of surviving.

While there are clear indications that Paul suffered from illness, it is by no means certain that it was an illness he referred to here. However, an illness remains a distinct possibility.

Severe Persecution

The third option, that this affliction was some form of severe persecution, presents a range of possibilities. There are also varying degrees of probability associated with the various suggestions.

Some see this as an allusion to fighting the “wild animals at Ephesus” (1 Cor 15:32). This seems unlikely in view of the fact that Paul appears to be writing about a much more recent event. Additionally, it was probably an event the
Corinthians knew little, if anything, about, while Paul had already told them about the “wild animals at Ephesus”.

Another possibility is the riot described in Acts 19:23-20:1 that resulted in Paul leaving Ephesus,\(^ {10}\) or its aftermath.\(^ {11}\) However, Acts reports Paul being given a warning not to place himself in a position of danger (19:30-31), but gives no indication that Paul’s life was actually endangered. If this is the event referred to here, the Acts’ account has either underestimated the danger to Paul, something that is quite possible, or has deliberately down-played it.

Another suggestion is an imprisonment in Ephesus\(^ {12}\) where Paul’s life was endangered, possibly because he had been given a “death sentence” or expected to be given a “death sentence”. Philippians was written from prison, and there is evidence to suggest that it may have been written from Ephesus. There are some parallels between Philippians 1-2 and 2 Cor 1:1-11, including Paul’s suffering having a positive benefit for others, sharing in prayer, and the key words of “encouragement” (\(\pi\alpha\rho\acute{\alpha}κληρις\)), “mercy” (\(\omicron\iota\kappa\tau\iota\mu\alpha\omicron\zeta\)), “distress” (\(\theta\lambda\iota\psi\iota\zeta\)), as well as the verb “to suffer” (\(\pi\acute{\alpha}σχω\)). However, an Ephesian imprisonment, although likely, is not a certainty. And while in Phil 1:21-24 Paul did discuss the dilemma of deciding which was better – remaining to continue ministry or going to be with the Lord – the extreme distress and despair evident in 2 Cor 1:8 is not evident. In fact he spoke of confidence that God would deliver him because that would be of greater benefit to the churches.

\(^ {10}\) This is the preferred option of Barnett, 1996, pp 83-84.
\(^ {11}\) Windisch (1924, p 45, cited in Harris, 2005, p 170) considers it to be an attempt by the Ephesian populace to lynch Paul after the Ephesian riot.
\(^ {12}\) This is the option cautiously adopted by Furnish (1984, pp 113-114, 123).
It is also possible that the affliction Paul refers to in this passage may have been some other event not recorded elsewhere. It is clear that Acts does not record the whole of Paul’s ministry, even in the time periods it covers, and Paul’s own letters have few biographical details. Other possibilities for this particular affliction include some other public disturbance in Ephesus not recorded elsewhere, or severe persecution or other external danger faced on the journey from Ephesus to Troas,\(^{13}\) or even an event in Troas itself that is not recorded either in Acts or in Paul’s narrative in 2 Corinthians.

**Conclusions regarding the nature of the affliction**

As the details are tantalizingly brief and all the evidence is circumstantial, very little can be determined with certainty. Thus, any conclusion regarding the event that Paul refers to in 2 Cor 1:8-9, must be held tentatively.

It would seem that, given Paul’s history of persecution, the possibility of Paul’s life being endangered on this occasion through some form of severe and violent persecution is certainly possible, perhaps even probable. However, whether this was an Ephesian imprisonment or some other form of persecution or external danger is open to conjecture.\(^{14}\) Because the possibilities within this option are so wide ranging, it makes a conclusion difficult. And the evidence suggesting a severe illness is also very strong, so that remains a distinct possibility. It is also a possibility that it was a combination of both of these, with an episode of illness

\(^{13}\) This is the option preferred by Belleville (1996, pp 57-58).
\(^{14}\) This is the conclusion drawn by Thrall (1994, p 117) and is given as a possibility in Hughes (1962, p 19).
being triggered by an incident of persecution. Whatever its exact nature, it seems most likely that it was a recent event that the Corinthians knew little or nothing about. What is clear is that Paul believed he would die; in fact he had lost all hope of survival, and yet he was rescued by God.

The following arguments are based on the high probability that the “affliction” was either a severe persecution or a severe illness, but allow for the possibility that it may have been either, or even some combination of both. Ultimately, the theological significance that Paul places on the event is not dependent on the exact nature of the event. Rather, it is dependent on Paul’s assessment of his chances of survival and the fact that God rescued him, even though that seemed impossible.

**Theological Significance of the “Affliction”**

While there has been much discussion about what the affliction may have been, there has been much less discussion about the theological significance of the event, or its impact on Paul and his understanding of ministry. If its theological significance is discussed at all, it is usually discussed in terms of the event being an example of the connection between suffering and comfort. It is also occasionally discussed in terms of Paul’s possible understanding of the likelihood, or otherwise, of his surviving to see the *Parousia*.

In this experience of affliction, Paul did, indeed, receive God’s comfort. He believed he would die, in fact, he had lost all hope of survival; and yet he was rescued by God. He had received God’s comfort, and now in this letter, he passed that on to the Corinthians. This experience was an example of what he had been
explaining about the relationship between suffering and comfort. And yet it was much more than that. For here, the reason Paul gave for the experience was not so that he would be able to comfort others, but so that he would learn to rely on God, “God who raises the dead” (1:9).

“God who Raises the Dead”

Describing God as one “who raises the dead” had OT precedent (Deut 32:39; 1 Sam 2:6), and it was also part of the second prayer of the Eighteen Benedictions (Martin, 1986, p 15; O’Brien, 1977, p 250; Thrall, 1994, p 119). Paul would have been very aware of the Jewish background and it may well have influenced his wording; however, for him the primary evidence that God was indeed a “God who raises the dead” was the resurrection of Jesus. It was this that formed the basis of Paul’s theology and ministry. The death and resurrection of Jesus formed both the theological basis and the paradigm for Paul’s ministry. As he had already stated, “For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so through Christ the comfort also overflows to us” (1:5). And as he would later state, “He was crucified as a result of weakness, but he lives as a result of God’s power. So we also, in our dealings with you, share in his weakness, but we will live with him as a result of God’s power” (13:4).

Impact on Paul of the Near-Death Experience

The language Paul used to describe his response to the experience is intense: ὅτι καθ’ ύπερβολήν ὑπὲρ δύναμιν ἐβαρήθημεν ὅστε ἐξαπορηθῆναι ἡμᾶς καὶ τοῦ ζῆν. The intensity of the language and the difficulty of finding words in English to express it are evidenced by the variety of translations:
The burden of it was far too heavy for us to bear, so heavy that we despaired of life (NEB, REB).

For we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself (RSV, NRSV).

We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life (NIV, and TNIV, which has life itself).

We were under extraordinary pressure, beyond our powers of endurance, so that we gave up all hope even of surviving (NJB).

We were utterly weighed down beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life (NAB).

The emotional intensity here is unique in Paul’s writings. On numerous occasions Paul mentioned, and even listed, various afflictions he had undergone in the course of ministry. But the lists are matter-of-fact, stating the events without the emotions that went with them. Here, there is little information about the actual event; the emphasis is on his emotional response to the event, and its theological significance.

The nearest parallel is the combination of 2 Cor 2:12-13 and 7:5-6. Paul’s express purpose for going to Troas was “to proclaim the good news of Christ” (2:12), and there was ample opportunity to do so. The passive “a door was opened for me in the Lord” (θόρας μοι ἀνεψωμένης ἐν κυρίῳ, 2:12) suggests that this opportunity was God-given. But because Titus had not arrived, Paul was unable to settle to ministry there, so said farewell and moved on to Macedonia. But even when he arrived there, he still had no rest (2:13). Affliction continued, both inward and outward (7:5). It was only when Titus arrived, that he experienced God’s consolation in this particular matter (7:6).

There may have been a link between Paul’s inability to settle to ministry in Troas and the event he referred to as the “affliction in Asia”. The two would seem to be
quite closely related in time, with the latter most likely occurring prior to leaving Ephesus, en route from Ephesus to Troas, or in Troas itself. If this “affliction” was illness or some form of physical persecution, Paul may still have been recovering. Physical depletion would have been likely to accentuate the concern he felt for Titus and the church in Corinth, and these concerns, coupled with the “conflicts without”, were severe enough that he was unable to continue in ministry, or even to find rest when he reached Macedonia.

But whatever the exact identification of the “affliction in Asia” and whatever connection it may have had with the concerns Paul experienced in Troas, what is clear from the intensity of the language that Paul used, is that he did not expect to survive. In essence he had a “near-death experience”. For most people such experiences have a wide-ranging impact on their lives. It is to be expected that the same would hold true for Paul. Far from this experience simply being an example he supplied to back up a theological point – there were many experiences in his life that could have been cited in that manner – this was an experience that was fresh in his mind and was currently dominating his thinking.

It is reasonable to assume that such an intensely emotional and life-threatening experience would impact what Paul would write in the whole of this letter. In fact it will be argued that this event does, indeed, become a governing stimulus for the way Paul argues. The lesson he learned, or perhaps it is better to say re-learned, through this event, would become the backdrop against which he would defend his ministry.
Relying on God

The reason Paul identified for having been through this experience is so that he would learn “not to rely on ourselves, but rely on God who raises the dead” (1:9). In the affliction he had been powerless; he had had no human options left. The only option he had was to abandon any reliance on his own strength, or on the strength of other people; to abandon any pretence of self-sufficiency; and rely solely on God.

This was not a new lesson for Paul. The illusion of self-sufficiency was dealt a harsh blow in Paul’s conversion experience. Being blinded, he was dependent on others to lead him into the city. Then he was dependent on another follower of Jesus, and ultimately on God, to regain his sight. It was also a lesson he had learned in a very distinct way fourteen years prior to writing this letter. The events he would go on to describe in chapter 12 led him to conclude, “Therefore I will all the more gladly boast in my weaknesses so that the power of Christ will take up residence in me” (12:9b).

Conclusion

The reliance on God that this near-death experience produced in Paul is very compatible with what he would later write in chapter 12.\textsuperscript{15} This applies whether a traditional interpretation of 12:9 is maintained or whether the alternative interpretation previously proposed is accepted.

\textsuperscript{15} This holds true whether chapters 10-13 are regarded as part of the same letter or a separate letter sent shortly afterwards. Even for a letter written a short time later, the impact of this near-death experience would still be likely to have a significant effect on the way Paul would write.
Just as through the “thorn in the flesh” Paul was placed in a position where the “power of Christ” could “take up residence” in him, through this near-death experience he had been forced to rely on “God who raises the dead”. In both cases, it is in the midst of Paul’s weakness and suffering, that “God’s power is demonstrated”, to use traditional language. However, if the alternative interpretation of 2 Cor 12:9 is accepted, there is an additional parallel. If “power is brought to an end in weakness” is accepted as a valid translation, there is in both passages a contrast between human power and God’s power. In 1:9 Paul claimed that the reason for the near-death experience was “so that we might not rely on ourselves, but rely on God who raises the dead”. Here is a distinct contrast between reliance on human resources and reliance on God. A similar contrast can be seen in chapter 12. The “thorn in the flesh” is given so that Paul would “not become puffed up with pride” (12:7). It is in the weakness of the “thorn in the flesh” that Paul’s own power, his self-sufficiency, is brought to an end. It is then that the “power of Christ” would “take up residence” in him and enable him to say, “When I am weak, then I am strong” (12:10b). In both situations, the extremity of weakness forced Paul to abandon any allusion of self-sufficiency, and to rely completely on God.

The way Paul depicted his near-death experience is also harmonious with his summary of his paradigm for ministry given in 13:4. His affliction (1:4), his sharing in Christ’s sufferings (1:5), his near-death experience (1:8) parallels his later statement that he shared in Christ’s weakness (13:4). And his account of God’s rescue from “so deadly a peril” (1:10) and his learning to rely “on God who
raises the dead” (1:9) parallel his living with Christ “as a result of God’s power” (13:4). This experience in Asia was a concrete example of his paradigm for ministry: sharing both in Christ’s weakness and suffering as well as in God’s power, was a demonstration of Christ’s death and resurrection.
Chapter 6

Competency for Ministry

2 Corinthians 2:14 – 3:6

Situational Background  (2 Corinthians 1:12 – 2:13 and 7:5-16)

Paul’s defence of his ministry needs to be understood against the background of the situation in Corinth and his relationship with the congregation there. The congregation were not happy with him, and at least some had been making allegations against him. In 2 Corinthians 1:12-2:13 he addressed the core of these allegations: that he was unreliable and his word could not be trusted because he had promised to visit, but had sent a disturbing letter instead. He came back to this in 7:5-16.

His first defence, his first witness as it were, was the witness of his conscience (1:12a). His conscience was clear. His behaviour generally, and in particular his behaviour towards the Corinthians, had been with sincerity and integrity (1:12b). But even here, where he appealed to his own conscience, he added that his behaviour was “not by human wisdom, but by the grace of God” (1:12c). The theme from the previous section is alluded to at the beginning of this section. The principle he described there, that he was “not to rely on [himself], but on God” (1:9), was not simply a theological concept, but a reality that governed his decision-making. Instead of relying on himself, on human wisdom, his decisions were the result of relying on God; the source of his decision-making was the grace of God (Barnett, 1997, p 96).
In the opening verses of this section (1:12-14), Paul dealt with the question of the comprehensibility, reliability and honesty of his letters. As this was an issue that Paul would come back to in 10:9-11, it would appear that there were a variety of accusations, including: Paul’s letters were difficult to understand; they did not say what he really meant; and that in some way what he said in his letters did not match how he lived.

Initially, he dealt specifically with his sincerity and the unambiguous nature of what he had written. He said he had not written anything that they could not read and understand (1:13). The play on words, ἀναγινώσκετε ... ἐπιγινώσκετε, “read ... understand”, is difficult to express in English, as is the similar play on words in 3:2 (γινώσκομεν καὶ ἀναγινώσκομεν, known and read). There were no hidden agendas in what he had written; it was all open and plain. And as he would make clear in chapter 10, there was congruity between what he wrote and what he said and did in person.

From 1:15 onwards, Paul began to address the specific complaint that his changes in travel plans were evidence of his unreliability and fickleness. He explained that his plan had been to visit them on his way to Macedonia and then to visit a second time before heading, with their assistance, for Judea (1:15-16). His plans were changed, however, in response to the situation he found in Corinth during the first of these two planned visits. That visit proved to be very painful, so Paul decided not to make the return visit as planned. Instead, he wrote a letter, what is now commonly referred to as the “Tearful Letter” or the “Severe Letter”, in an attempt to restore the relationship between himself and the congregation. His hope was
that when he did visit, it would be a time of joy for all concerned, rather than a repetition of the previous painful visit (2:1-4).

This appears to be the second time Paul had changed his plans regarding visiting Corinth. In 1 Cor 16:5-7 he explained that he planned to visit them after he had been to Macedonia, and that it would be an extended visit as he did not want to make a short visit in passing. This change of plans appears to have led to the accusation that he was “fickle” or acting “according to human standards”. Not so, said Paul. The faithfulness of Paul’s “word” (λόγος, 1:18), both in regard to travel plans and, by implication, his gospel message, was grounded in God’s faithfulness. Apparently accusations regarding his fickleness in the matter of travel plans had led to questions regarding the validity and reliability of the message he proclaimed. But, as he reminded them, both he and they had been given the Holy Spirit (1:22). For the Corinthians to doubt the validity of the message Paul proclaimed was to cast aspersions on their own reception of the Holy Spirit.

His second witness to the truthfulness of what he was saying was God himself (1:23). He staked his very life on it. This statement, which effectively becomes an oath, reveals the intensity of Paul’s feelings and the depth of the hurt he felt in the face of these accusations of fickleness with respect to his travel plans.

Rather than being the result of fickleness, self-interest, irresponsibility or making decisions “according to human standards”, his change of plans was the result of deliberate choices made for the benefit of the Corinthians (1:23-2:4). His change
from one visit to two had been to give them a double blessing/favour/benefit (lit., “second grace”, δευτέραν χάριν, 1:15). His decision not to make the return visit was “to spare” (φείδομαι) them the anguish of a second painful visit (1:23). These decisions were not based on personal whims, but on pastoral concerns for the Corinthian church.

The letter, too, was written for their benefit (2:3-4; cf. 7:8-12). It was not written out of vindictiveness or a desire to “get even”, but out of a pastoral concern for the church. It caused considerable pain and anguish for Paul as he wrote it, and similarly for the Corinthian congregation as they read it, but its purpose was to show Paul’s love for them and to restore the relationship between apostle and congregation.

Paul used the same word θλίψις, “affliction” or “distress”, to describe the anguish he felt at writing this letter, as he had to describe the situation in Asia where he had despaired of his life (1:8). He had also used this word in the opening thanksgiving (1:4) in relation to the comfort that comes from God that, in turn, can be shared with others. Previously Paul’s “affliction” had benefited the Corinthians, just as his “distress” in writing the letter had benefit for them and demonstrated his love for them.

As the news Titus brought shows (7:6-7, 13-16), his purpose was, at least to some extent, fulfilled. Paul was, in fact, exuberant in his joy over the positive response the Corinthians had made to his letter. However, Paul’s addressing of the issue of “false apostles” in chapters 10-13 suggests that not all of the congregation were
entirely convinced or completely reconciled to Paul. There continued to be some dissenters.

The anguish and tears suffered by Paul as he wrote the letter,¹ and by the Corinthians as they read it, led Paul to revisit the concern of the letter: the person who had caused the pain (2:5-11; cf. 7:12). It is almost certain that the wrong done had been done specifically to Paul.² However, as Paul pointed out, in doing injury to him this person had, in fact, done injury to the entire church. Paul did qualify this statement (2:5), though it is unclear whether ἀπὸ μέρος (lit., “from part”) modifies λέλυπηκεν (“has caused pain”) or πάντας ὑμᾶς (“all of you”). If it modifies λέλυπηκεν, then Paul was saying that the injury had caused pain to some extent to the whole church, though not everyone may have been affected to the same degree.³ Alternatively, if it modifies πάντας ὑμᾶς, he was suggesting that perhaps not quite all, but a significant proportion of the congregation, had been affected.⁴ Either way, Paul stated the situation cautiously.

The congregation, or at least the majority of the congregation (2:6), had responded to Paul’s letter and had dealt with the offender in some manner. The specifics are not disclosed, but the punishment imposed could have ranged from a mild rebuke to excommunication. That Paul now called for it to cease suggests that it was more significant than a mild rebuke. It is common to suggest some kind of formal

¹ The “I wrote” (ἐγραψα) in both 2:3 and 2:4 almost certainly refers to the “tearful letter” written instead of the promised visit (1:23), and will be discussed on the assumption that this is the case.
² Barnett (1997, p 124), Furnish (1984, p 160), Hafemann (2000, p 88), Harris (2005, p 227), Martin (1986, p 37) and Thrall (1994, pp 68-69, 171), among others, all argue that the initial injury was to Paul himself; contra Hughes (1962, p 64).
³ This is how Belleville (1996, p 73), Martin (1986, p 37) and Thrall (1994, p 172) argue. It is also the interpretation suggested by most standard translations.
⁴ This is acknowledged as a possibility by Martin (1986, p 37). Furnish (1984, p 155) suggests that Paul may have intended to qualify his statement in both respects, while Barnett (1997, p 124) simply says that Paul was not wanting to exaggerate.
disciplinary action that may have included exclusion from some aspects of congregational life such as attending the meeting and/or participating in the Eucharist.  

Whatever had been the exact action the church took, Paul considered it had been sufficient and called for it to be discontinued. Instead they were to forgive (χαρίζω) and to reaffirm (παρακαλέω) – suggesting a formal action – their love for the man (2:7-8). Paul reassured them that he joined with them in this forgiveness, not simply for the sake of the individual, but for the sake of the whole church (2:10-11).

In 1:12-13, Paul returned to the topic of his itinerary, as he would again in chapter 7. He had gone to Troas εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ. In whatever way the preposition εἰς should be understood here, it is clear that Paul’s purpose was to proclaim the good news of Christ. On arriving in Troas, he found that a “door was opened”; there were ample opportunities for evangelism. The passive voice suggests that it was God who had opened this door for him.

In spite of the open door, Paul was unable to settle to ministry. The fact that Titus had not arrived as planned, meant that he had no ἀνέσιν τῷ πνεύματί μου (lit., “relief in my spirit”). In 7:5 Paul describes this as οὖν ἐσχάλησεν ἀνέσιν ἦ

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5 Those who suggest this form of action include Barnett (1997, p 126), Belleville (1996, p 74), Harris (2005, p 228) and Thrall (1994, p 174).

6 Note that while most commentators and translations interpret τὴν Τρῳάδας as the city of Troas, it is possible that due to the inclusion of the definite article, it refers to “The Troad”, that is, the whole of the region in which Troas was situated (Thrall, 1994, pp 182-183; Scott, 1998, p 52). Furnish (1984, p 168), however, argues that it is not necessary to understand the use of definite article as a reference to the whole region, while Kistemaker (1997, p 87) proposes that the definite article suggests that Paul and Titus had agreed to meet there, and Martin (1986, p 41) concludes that it is “clearly not the province but Alexandria Troas, the port of embarkation for sea travellers from Asia to Macedonia”.

Δάφξ ἡμῶν (lit., “our flesh had not rest/relief”) and contrasts it with the verb θλίβω, “to afflict, to put under pressure”. As Barnett (1997, pp 132-133) comments:

The reference to inner turmoil in Troas (v. 13) adds to, and is continuous with, problems in Ephesus (“Asia”), namely, the “deadly peril” from which God delivered him and the “great distress and anguish” at writing the “Severe Letter” (1:10; 2:4). … Moreover, the anxiety experienced in Troas relates to them [i.e., the Corinthians], giving expression to the love he had for them when writing the “Severe Letter” (2:1-4) (emphasis original).

The result was that Paul said goodbye “to them” (αὐτοὶ, i.e., those in Troas, 2:13), indicating that there were converts in Troas. Whether these converts were the result of Paul’s preaching on this visit, or whether they were already believers, possibly from Paul’s first brief visit (Acts 16:6-11), or through the work of others, is not made clear. Certainly by the time Paul returned on his way to Jerusalem, there was already an established church in Troas (Acts 20:5-12). It is also plain that there was opportunity for Paul to have effective ministry in Troas at this time, but he chose to leave and move on to Macedonia, where he eventually met up with Titus.

The two passages (2:12-13 and 7:2-16) together make it clear that Paul’s distress was not simply due to concern over Titus’s whereabouts. It was actually concern over the response the Corinthians had made to his letter; again his actions had been motivated by pastoral concern and love for the Corinthians. Hafemann (2000, p 106) sums it up like this:

His anxiety over Titus, who was bringing news about whether or not the Corinthians had repented of their rebellion, was yet another concrete example of the suffering God had called Paul to bear as an apostle. Nothing was more important to Paul than their welfare, not even an opportunity to expand his own ministry!
These verses (2:12-13) are transitional (Barnett, 1997, p 133) and form a bridge between Paul’s travel apologia and his extended defence of his apostleship as new covenant ministry. They act as a conclusion to Paul’s justification for his failure to make the second promised visit to Corinth and the dispatch of the “Tearful Letter” instead. They also form a launching point and context for his explanation of new covenant ministry.

New Covenant Ministry (2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6)

In 2:14-3:6 Paul described and defended his apostleship as new covenant ministry. He did this by a series of metaphors and rhetorical questions, with each metaphor only briefly alluded to. Additionally, one image flows into another without clear borderlines, resulting in some phrases being ambiguous with regard to which image they refer to. Clearly Paul expected that the few words he used would evoke the entire picture. This may well have been the case for his first century audience, but from a distance of almost two thousand years, the images he wished to appeal to are not as readily comprehended. This is largely due to the significant difference in social environment and customs between the first and the twenty-first centuries. Without the appropriate cultural filters to give parameters to the images, the twenty-first century reader is left with a range of possibilities for each metaphor, and thus a range of possibilities for the interpretation of the passage. It is tempting to opt for the most appealing interpretation for each phrase or sentence without reference to how it fits into the whole. The challenge, however, is to determine an interpretation for each segment such that the entire
sub-section can be understood as a coherent whole, and thus that its place within
the whole discourse can be comprehended.

The Metaphor of the Triumphal Procession (2 Corinthians 2:14a)

The first metaphor Paul used is one that has been the subject of much debate and
speculation over the centuries. He began by giving thanks to God who “always
\( \thetaυριαμβε\υνευ\tau\iota \) us in Christ” (2:14). The core of the debate and the solution to the
significance of the metaphor lie in the meaning of the word \( \thetaυριαμβε\υ\omega \). There is
general agreement, with only minor dissension, that the original social setting of
the image is the Roman triumphal procession where a victorious general led both
his troops and prisoners of war in a parade through Rome. But which aspects of
the parade Paul was referring to and what significance he placed on them are
topics of much debate and disagreement. The major categories of possibilities –
and there are a variety of possible nuances within each category, with some
overlap between categories – are as follows:

- to cause to triumph
- to triumph over
- to lead [soldiers of the conquering army] in triumphal procession
- to lead [captives] in triumphal procession
- to display, publicise, make known
- to expose to shame
- to lead in celebration (in a religious context)
To cause to triumph

The KJV, which reads, “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ”, is an example of the traditional and widespread practice of translating the verb θραμβεύω as “cause to triumph”. Many older translations, and a number of newer ones, either make explicit or imply this interpretation. As Calvin (ET: 1964, p 33) noted, if the verb is taken literally it refers to a Roman triumphal procession where “prisoners are said to be led in triumph when to disgrace them they are bound in chains and dragged before the chariot of the conqueror”. Calvin could not reconcile such an image with the apostle Paul and so concluded that, “Paul means something different from the common meaning of this phrase…” (CNTC 10: 1964, p 33).

As with Calvin, the continuation of this interpretation seems to be due to an underlying theological presupposition that Paul would not have given thanks for being led as a captive. In some sense Paul can be understood to be “victorious in Christ” (cf. 1 Cor 15:57; Rom 8:17, 37) and so this aspect of being a “minister of Christ” is read into θραμβεύω in preference to taking the word with its normal meaning.

It is, however, very difficult to find lexical support for a meaning of “cause to triumph”. While BAGD (1979, p 363b) cites an example in Ctesias where θραμβεύως τὸν μάχον means “after he had procured a triumph for the ἐμάχον”, in

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7 Note the CEV “I am grateful that God always makes it possible for Christ to lead us to victory in Christ”, the NAB “But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ”, the NKJV “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ”, and The Message “In the Messiah, in Christ, God leads us from place to place in one perpetual victory parade” (emphasis added). However, θραμβεύω is not translated this way in Col 2:15.
the more recent edition (BDAG, 2000, p 459b) this is considered “very questionable”. Both Thrall (1994, p 192) and McDonald (1983, p 36) note the possibility of a parallel with other verbs ending with -ευω being used in a causative or factitive sense, but also note that there are no actual examples of θρυμβεύω being used this way. BDAG (2000, p 459b) concludes that this meaning “remains unexampled in Gk. usage”.

To triumph over

The second option is to understand the verb as “to triumph over” in the sense of conquering. Certainly being led as a captive in a Roman triumphal procession presupposes having been conquered, but there is disagreement about whether the word itself means this. Thrall (1994, p 194) states that it does not, while McDonald (1983, p 36) states that “Lexically, this is normal usage.” As BDAG (2000, p 459) notes, it is common to translate θρυμβεύω this way in Col 2:15,8 the only other NT use of the word.

When translated this way in 2 Cor 2:14, it is common to understand it in terms of Paul’s conversion experience: Christ conquered him on the road to Damascus. Those who argue against this interpretation, cite the πάντοτε, “always”, as evidence that this cannot be correct. The Damascus road experience was a single event, and cannot be described in terms of an ongoing conquering. However, Paul’s conversion experience can be described as an initial conquering, with his life as an apostle being the triumphal procession that celebrated that victory.

Lambrecht (1999, pp 38-39) sums it up like this:

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8 Translations that have “triumph over” for θρυμβεύω in Col 2:15 include KJV, RSV, NKJV, NIV, NRSV, ESV and TNIV.
Through Paul’s conversion on the way to Damascus God won in Christ a victory over Paul. God celebrates that victory over him by a triumphal procession that does not take place once (in Rome), but always, i.e., during and through Paul’s missionary journeys.

Counter to this, Thrall (1994, p 194) raises the following objection:

But is it likely that he [i.e. Paul] would see God, or Christ, as continually celebrating a victory over him, almost as though he were still an enemy? Is it really possible that he supposes that, in his sufferings, Christ celebrates victory by exposing him to public ridicule? It seems more than a little improbable.

Belleville (1996, pp 81-81) takes a slightly different approach, arguing that Paul was “thinking of God’s ability to overcome ministerial weaknesses and ineffectiveness”. However, the phrase is θρημάζειντι ἡμᾶς, “triumph over us”, not triumph over things such as weakness, ineffectiveness or even obstacles or opposition.

To lead [soldiers of the conquering army] in triumphal procession

This interpretation, like the one that follows, takes the image of the Roman triumphal procession seriously, although the two options differ in how they interpret that image. One interprets it as being led in the triumphal procession as part of the conquering army, the other as one of the prisoners of war.

Although soldiers of the conquering army were involved in the procession, there is no lexical support for understanding θρημάζειντι ἡμᾶς, “lead in triumphal procession”, as referring to members of the conquering army (BDAG, 2000, p 459b). Not many translations specifically support this understanding, but the common

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9 Hughes (1962, p 76) draws a similar conclusion.
10 One example where it can be understood to be implied is the NJB: “who always gives us in Christ a part in his triumphal procession”.

translation “always leads us in triumphal procession”\textsuperscript{11} can easily be understood this way, particularly if the reader is unaware of the details of a Roman triumphal procession. This rendering, of course, can also be understood to mean “led as a captive in a triumphal procession” but this requires a level of background knowledge that the average reader is unlikely to have. Notwithstanding several recent motion pictures that have depicted Roman triumphal processions, the probability that the average reader would have sufficient understanding of the event to interpret the allusion as being to the prisoners rather than the conquering army, is low. In twenty-first century Western culture victory parades most often relate to sporting events. The victors are celebrated, but those who have been defeated are not usually humiliated. In fact, those who have been “defeated” are also frequently celebrated and honoured for their efforts and achievements, even though they did not gain the ultimate prize. Given this cultural background, one so different from the first century, then both “led in triumphal procession” and “led in triumph”, when taken at face value, from a twenty-first century Western perspective suggest that Paul is part of those who are triumphing in their victory.

Even with the lack of lexical evidence, and even acknowledging the lack of lexical support, some commentators still conclude that this is the best solution. Watson (1993, p 22), for example, comes to the following conclusion:

Any suggestion that the relationship of the messengers to God is like that of conquered prisoners or that they are constantly being exposed to shame and humiliation hardly fits the setting of a thanksgiving. … It would seem more in keeping with the present context for the messengers of Christ to be compared to the victorious general’s soldiers rather than his captives, but there is no clear lexical support for the use of the verb in this precise sense.

\textsuperscript{11} Translations that have this reading include NIV, NRSV, NET, and ESV. The translation “always leads us in triumph” (RSV, NASB, NKJV, NAB) can also be understood this way, but may also be understood as very similar, if not the same as “causes us to triumph”.

The reality which seems to be in Paul’s mind is that he who had once fought against Christ is now one of his most trusted lieutenants.\textsuperscript{12}

This type of conclusion is based on theological conviction, which is seen to override lexical evidence to the contrary. This is not dissimilar to the line of reasoning that caused Calvin (CNTC 10: 1964, pp 33-34) to conclude that:

Paul means that he had a share in the triumph that God was celebrating because it was through his work that it was won, just as the chief lieutenants shared the general’s triumph by riding on horseback beside his chariot. Thus since all ministers of the Gospel fight under God’s banner and win for Him the victory and the honour of a triumph, He honours each of them with a share in His triumph according to his rank in the army and the efforts he has made.

If this is indeed how Paul meant the image to be understood, one has to ask whether the congregation at Corinth would have been likely to have understood it in this way, when the evidence suggests that the common understanding of the word would have been as a reference to the captives who were paraded, not to officers in the conquering army. Furthermore, this translation hardly fits Col 2:15 if, as the traditional interpretation suggests, the rulers and authorities, whether human or spiritual, are in opposition to God.\textsuperscript{13}

To lead [captives] in triumphal procession

In recent times, a more literal interpretation of $\theta\rho\mu\alpha\beta\epsilon\upsilon\omega$, which understands Paul to be referring to being led as a captive in a triumphal procession, has become more widespread. It is a view that has also been made explicit in a number of

\textsuperscript{12} Barrett (1973, p 98) makes a similar sort of statement.

\textsuperscript{13} Egan (1977, pp 55-57) and Findlay (1879, pp 408-411) argue that these powers and authorities are positive because they are said to have been created through and for Christ (Col 1:15-16) and to be ruled by him (Col 2:11).
more recent translations\textsuperscript{14} and is subscribed to by a number of recent commentators. Thrall’s (1994, p 195) comment provides a good summary of the position:

Whatever the exegetical difficulties, it is surely right to understand the verb in its usual, attested sense when followed by a direct object, ‘lead (as a conquered prisoner) in a triumphal procession’, and to see the image as derived from the Roman triumph.

Similarly, Hafemann (1990a, p 32) states that “the evidence demands that we first attempt to understand both Col. 2:15 and II Cor. 2:14 in the light of the one, common meaning which is attested for the time of Paul” before opting, on the basis of theological persuasion, for meanings that have no lexical support. He argues that the “verb refers only to the specific Roman ceremony of the triumphal procession” (1990, p 31, emphasis original). While this presupposes a prior victory – a triumphal procession without a prior victory is unthinkable – it does not include the victory itself. So in Col 2:15 the rulers and authorities are disarmed prior to being led in a triumphal procession. A similar situation applies to Paul in 2 Cor 2:14. His “defeat” consists of his Damascus Road conversion experience, but this is presupposed, not included in the “led in triumphal procession”.

Thrall (1994, p 195) is cautious in the way she perceives Paul to be applying the image, maintaining that:

At the same time, one has to ask how much content should be read into it. The emphasis at this point lies on the activity of God, as the prominent position of ταφ … θεοφ indicates. Hence, it may be the glory of the divine

\textsuperscript{14} Translations that explicitly present this interpretation include: NEB/REB “God who continually leads us about, captives in Christ’s triumphal procession”, TEV “we are always led by God as prisoners in Christ’s victory procession”, NLT “God who made us his captives and leads us along in Christ’s triumphal procession”, and TNIV “God who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession”.

victory that is primarily in view, rather than the humiliation and prospective death-sentence of the apostle. All that Paul may be trying to say may be that his apostolic activity serves to demonstrate the power of God (cf. 4:7), just as the presence of conquered prisoners in the triumphal procession served to emphasise the might of the victorious Roman commander.

In contrast, Hafemann (1990a, pp 16-34), using numerous sources from the first century BCE to the first century CE, argues strongly that those who were “led in triumph” were, in fact, being led to their deaths.

What must be emphasized, however, is that all the evidence points to the conclusion that there is only one basic and common meaning for this term available in the time of Paul, namely, that of the triumphal procession in which the conquered enemies were usually led as slaves to death, being spared this death only by an act of grace on the part of the one celebrating the triumph (Hafemann, 1990a, p 33, emphasis original).

He further argues that it is this image of being led to death that Paul uses here.\(^{15}\)

This meaning fits with the context and also “corresponds to Paul’s apostolic self-conception as developed throughout the Corinthian correspondence as a whole”. Integral to understanding Paul’s thought in this passage is “the realization that to be ‘led in triumph’ means, in fact, to be ‘led to death’” (Hafemann, 1990a, p 34).

In response to Hafemann, Harris (2005, pp 245-246) observes:

There is, of course, danger in pressing the metaphor. It is one thing to recognize that *θριμμβευ,ω* τινα means “lead someone (as a captive) in a triumphal procession,” so that Paul regards himself as a defeated enemy, an *αιριμμάλωτος*, “a prisoner of war.” It is quite another to infer, as Hafemann does, that these prisoners of war were “slaves” (*δουλοί*), a term Paul uses of himself (e.g., Rom. 1:1), and that since these enemies were slain during or after the procession, Paul envisaged God as leading him “as a slave to death.”

Harris goes on to point out that when Paul does use the phrase “to death” (*εις θάνατον*; 2:16a) in this passage, it refers not to Paul, but to those who are “not

being saved” (οἱ ἀπολλύμενοι, 2:15b). And secondly, not all prisoners exhibited in a triumphal procession were executed. He does, however, agree with Hafemann that Paul sees himself as a previously conquered captive led in the triumphal procession, and as such, is witness to God’s victory.

Murphy-O’Connor, while not emphasising the aspect of being led to death as strongly as Hafemann, does conclude that Paul “presents himself as one of the captives destined to be executed” (1991, p 29). He goes on to note that this is consistent with Paul’s later statement that “we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake” (4:11), particularly as both verses include the word “always”.

Scott (1996, pp 260-281; 1998, pp 60-64, 90-92) takes a different line of reasoning; he begins with the image of the Roman triumphal procession, but does not place the emphasis on Paul as a captive, though does acknowledge that is what he is. Rather he places the emphasis on God, riding in his chariot, as the one who leads the triumphal procession, linking it with the mysticism of the throne chariot of God. He sees Paul as a “revelatory mediator who infuses the world with an aromatic, Torah-like knowledge of God through the Spirit” (1998, p 64) and argues that this passage should be viewed in relation to others that involve mystical experiences of God’s glory. Hafemann (2000, p 110) criticises this view, arguing that “it makes far more sense, when one takes into view the immediate context and the more far-reaching content of several of Paul’s letters, to see 2:14 as a reference to his suffering as an apostle”.

To display, publicise, make known

Egan (1977, p 35) follows Findlay in his objections to interpreting θριαμβεύω in terms of the Roman triumphal procession, but follows Field’s suggestion of “display, reveal, manifest” as the meaning of the verb. The primary evidence he uses to support his argument is the use of θρίαμβος and ἐκθριαμβιζω. He cites the Acta Pauli et Theclae, a second century work, to support a meaning of “exposure” or “displaying” for θρίαμβος (1977, p 42), and a 14 BCE document to support a meaning of “make known” for ἐκθριαμβιζω (1977, pp 41-42). But ἐκθριαμβιζω is not θριαμβεύω and may not have the same meaning. Prefixed verbs do not always have the same meaning as the cognate non-prefixed verb, a fact that Egan uses to his advantage with regard to παραδιεγματίζω and διεγματίζω (1977, p 53). Furthermore, ἐκθριαμβιζω is a hapax legomenon, making definite determination of its range of meanings impossible. McDonald (1983, p 38) and Thrall (1994, p 192), while admitting the meaning of θρίαμβος, argue that there is no evidence supporting a similar meaning for θριαμβεύω.

A meaning of “display, make public” for θριαμβεύω reduces it to a synonym of φανερόω, producing a redundancy (Thrall, 1994, p 193). Hafemann (1990a, pp 36-37) argues that it is better to see the two verbs as a progression:

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16 Findlay’s work was published in 1879 and Field’s in 1899. Both are cited by Egan (1977, p 35). As will be discussed in the next section, Findlay concludes that the meaning of the verb is “to lead in festal or choral (dithyrambic) procession, to lead in triumph, but as the inspiring Deity his exultant worshippers, not as the Roman conqueror his wretched captives”.

v.14a Thanks be to God

v.14b and in so doing reveals through me as an apostle the fragrance of the knowledge of him in every place (emphasis original).

With the translation, “To God be thanks, who in Christ always puts us on display (as if we were prisoners in a triumphal procession)”, Furnish (1984, p 173) opts for a cautious merging of θριαμβεύειν meaning “display, make public” and the possibility of an allusion to being led as a captive in a triumphal procession. He (1984, p 175) places the words “as if we were prisoners in a triumphal procession” in brackets for two reasons:

First, in itself the expression thriambeuonti hēmas need mean nothing more than puts us on display, and one cannot be completely certain that Paul intends an allusion to the Roman triumph. Second, even if there is such an allusion here, it is secondary to the main point in vv. 14-16 – namely, that the gospel of Christ is effectively proclaimed by means of Paul’s ministry. There is no sustained application of the imagery of a Roman triumph to the Pauline apostolate, as some interpreters (and trs.) tend to suggest (emphasis original).

To expose to shame

To understand the verb θριαμβεύειν to mean “to expose to shame” is to understand it metaphorically, and the point of comparison is limited to the shame and humiliation of prisoners exhibited in a Roman triumphal procession.

Marshall (1983, pp 303-311), while admitting to being unable to find an example of a metaphorical use of θριαμβεύειν, does provide evidence of a Latin triumph metaphor, and concludes that it is “not unreasonable to assume the existence of a Greek counterpart” (1983, p 311). With regard to the actual celebration of the triumph, he argues that “θριαμβεύειν (and the noun θρίαμβος) is equivalent in meaning to the Latin verb triumphare (noun, triumphus)” (1983, p 303). He further argues that “Cicero on three occasions uses the phrase triumphare gaudio
to allude to the celebration of the triumphant” (1983, pp 304-305), and that
Seneca, a Roman contemporary of Paul, in his sustained metaphorical use of
triumphare, emphasises the shame and humiliation felt by the person paraded.

There can be no doubt that the triumph is used here as a metaphor of shame. It is also worth noting that the ideas of display, making a spectacle of, holding up to ridicule and of shame are implicit in this form of the metaphor (1983, p 305).

His conclusion is that in 2 Cor 2:14 “the triumphal motif ‘led captive in triumph’ is simply a metaphor of social shame” and “that it is both contextually suitable and consistent with Paul’s characteristic portrayal of himself in the conflict in Corinth as a socially shameful figure” (1983, p 313).

Certainly Paul did present himself as humiliated and socially disadvantaged. He “boasted” of the things that were regarded as socially shameful; he boasted in his weaknesses and suffering. It was in the midst of, even because of, these that God’s power was demonstrated, as a result of which the Corinthians had received the gospel. But whether the image as Paul intended it should be limited to an image of shame is debatable. If the allusion to the Roman triumphal procession only refers to the aspect of shame, and does not include the aspect of “led to death”, then some of the links with other parts of Paul’s defence of his apostolic ministry are lost. For example, the parallel with 4:11, “we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake” is lost, as is the parallel with 1 Cor 4:9, “For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death.”
To Lead in Celebration (in a religious context)

Based on the usage of θρίαμβος and διθύραμβος, coupled with the mention of “fragrance”, Findlay (1879, p 416) offers the following meaning for θριαμβεύω:

“to lead in festal or choral (dithyrambic) procession, to lead in triumph, but as the inspiring Deity his exultant worshipers, not as the Roman conqueror his wretched captives”. He argues that Paul’s audience in Corinth would have understood the verb more naturally in association with Greco-Asiatic festal ceremonies than in association with Roman triumphal processions. Additionally (1879, p 408), he argues that this meaning would fit with Col 2:15, given that the “principalities and powers” are “none other than those of Verse 10, of whom Christ is the Head; viz., the angelic intermediaries between God and the world … to whom we have been introduced in Chap. i. 16” (emphasis original), and not powers opposed to God, as is traditionally accepted.

Following Findlay, McDonald acknowledges the possibility of a celebratory nuance to θρηματίζω, but felt that Findlay pressed his case too far with the comment:

If there was any metaphor within the range of the Greco-Asiatic world which could paint to the life the career [sic] of the Apostle as we know him in this Epistle, it was that of the mystic Dionysiac triumph, purified and transmuted by the touch of Christian use, and lifted into a region infinitely higher than its own (Findlay, 1879, p 420, cited in McDonald, 1983, p 38).

McDonald (1983, p 39) argued that Greeks would more readily have associated the incense that is alluded to in 2 Cor 2:14 with “religious processions in general rather than Roman triumphs in particular”, supporting a religious celebratory nuance. While he suggests that contextually a meaning of “lead in celebration” fits, he also acknowledges that “while the connotation of θρηματίζω is not in
dispute, there is no specific corroboration of the use of όριαμπέβεσυν in this way” (1983, p 38) He concludes (1983, p 40):

I find this an attractive idea: όριαμπέβεσυν as ‘lead in celebration’ fits the context well and may have been linked in Paul’s mind with his temple theology. But the lexical difficulty remains (emphasis original).

**Conclusion regarding the meaning of όριαμπέβεσυν**

The divergent conclusions drawn regarding the meaning of όριαμπέβεσυν as Paul used it highlight the difficulty of coming to a precise conclusion and suggests that a level of caution is required. Some conclusions are, however, possible and, in fact, are necessary, if there is to be any real understanding of the passage as a whole. Following Hafemann (1990a, p 32), Thrall (1994, p 195) and Harris (2005, pp 244-245), it seems reasonable to expect that the meaning Paul intended will have lexical support and that it will be applicable to both 2 Cor 2:14 and Col 2:15.

There is no lexical support for “to cause to triumph” or “to lead [soldiers of the conquering army] in triumphal procession”. While contextually either may seem to fit the context of 2 Cor 2:14, it is difficult to comprehend how they might fit the context of Col 2:15. Similarly, with “to triumph over”, which apart from frequently being the preferred translation in Col 2:15, appears to lack lexical support. And it is difficult to fit this meaning into 2 Cor 2:14 without resorting to assuming it refers to Paul’s conversion experience, something that is not explicit in the passage and is made unlikely by the inclusion of πάντοτε, “always”. This would then seem to rule out these interpretations as viable possibilities.
While there is lexical support for \( \text{qriambeu}, \text{w} \) being used of being “led in celebration (in a religious context)”, there is no direct lexical support for \( \text{qriambeu}, \text{w} \) being used this way. The use of “fragrance” and “odour” in close proximity to 2 Cor 2:14 suggests that a religious celebratory meaning cannot be excluded as a possibility, but the evidence that this is the primary meaning is weak.

The two options, “to display, publicise, make known” and “to expose to shame”, both derive from the Roman triumphal procession image, but take only one facet of the image and make it the primary focus. Each clearly fits the contexts of both 2 Cor 2:14 and Col 2:15, but whether the image – as Paul used it – is limited to one of these facets is debatable. Both options weaken the triumphal procession image and, in particular, “to display, publicise, make known”, raises the question of how much, consciously or unconsciously, proponents are motivated by the desire to make the image more palatable, more compatible with the common understanding of “apostle” being a position of honour. Nevertheless, neither of these options can be ruled out, and at minimum they would seem to be included in Paul’s intended meaning. This is particularly so of the interpretation “to expose to shame”, as throughout the Corinthian correspondence Paul presented himself in a manner that the Corinthians viewed as “shameful” rather than “honourable”.

This leaves the option of “to lead [captives] in triumphal procession”. As Hafemann (1990a, pp 16-34) has demonstrated, the lexical evidence strongly supports the use of \( \text{qriambeu}, \text{w} \) as a reference to captives being led in a Roman triumphal procession, and – so Hafemann would maintain – led to their death.
In contrast, outside of Paul, one must turn to the equivalent Latin term, *triumphare*, for a metaphorical use with a meaning limited to “display”, “expose to shame” (Marshall, 1983, pp 303-311).

It would seem then, that with the use of *qriambeu,ω*, Paul intended that a reference to the Roman triumphal procession be understood, but given the brief allusion, the caution of both Thrall and Harris regarding how much meaning should be read into it is valid. While examples of the use of the word from Paul’s time do seem to indicate that “led to their death” is implied, it is not clear how much emphasis on this aspect Paul intended. But “led to death” does fit with other self-descriptions of Paul as an apostle (cf. 1 Cor 4:9; 2 Cor 4:7-13; 6:3-10).

Furthermore, it could be argued that, against the background of his recent near-death experience, his despair of life, and his conviction of having received a “death sentence”, the thought of being led to death would be in Paul’s consciousness, and so should be understood in this context.

A meaning of “led as captives” can also be seen to be compatible with Col 2:15, particularly if the rulers and authorities described there are hostile to God.

While *qriambeu,ω* has the same meaning in 2 Cor 2:14 and Col 2:15 (“lead in triumphal procession”), and in one case they are (paradoxically) willing, joyful captives and vocal witnesses to the general’s victory (cf. 2:14b), while in the other they are involuntary, sullen captives and silent witnesses to the commander’s conquest (Harris, 2005, p 245).

But even if the rulers and authorities are not hostile, this meaning would be no more out of place for them than for the apostle Paul.

17 The parallels with and the significance of these passages will be discussed in subsequent sections.
The evidence suggests that in using the verb ἑρμηθεύω, Paul intended to evoke in the minds of his readers a picture of a Roman triumphal procession with himself, an apostle, being led to death as a captive in that procession for the purpose of spreading the knowledge of God everywhere. This is congruent with what Paul had already said about learning to rely on God and not on himself (1:9), and with what he would go on to say regarding the source of his sufficiency for ministry (2:16; 3:5-6). It is also congruent with what he would say regarding his paradigm for ministry being modelled on Christ who was “crucified as a result of weakness” but “raised as a result of God’s power” (13:4). Consequently, this is the meaning that will be taken as most likely to be correct and thus will be used as the basis for interpreting the rest of the passage.

The Metaphor of Aroma/Fragrance (2 Corinthians 2:14b-16a)

With the phrase “and uses us to make known everywhere the aroma of the knowledge of him” (2:14b), Paul moves to another metaphor; that of “aroma” or “fragrance”. Paul uses two words: ὀμή (2:14, 16[2x]) and εὐωδία (2:15). The two words are often used together as a hendiadys, sometimes separately as synonyms, but do have slightly different meanings. While both words can be translated “odour, smell, aroma, scent”, ὀμή does not in itself indicate whether the smell is pleasant or unpleasant, but can be translated “fragrance” or “stench” if the context is clear regarding the pleasantness or otherwise of the odour (BDAG,
2000, pp 728b-729a). In contrast, ἐνωδία does imply a sweet smell and can thus also be translated “fragrance” (BDAG, 2000, p 427b).\(^{18}\)

As with the previous metaphor, there are differences of opinion with regard to both the source of the image and the way in which Paul used it. Three possible sources are identified:

- The incense burned in the context of the Roman triumphal procession
- Wisdom literature where wisdom is referred to as a fragrance.
- OT use of the key words to refer to the incense in the tabernacle temple and/or sacrifices acceptable to God

When some conclusions have been drawn regarding sources, there remain a number of exegetical questions that require answers before any overall conclusions can be drawn regarding the way Paul uses this metaphor. These include:

- If Paul is using “aroma” with a sacrificial nuance, whose sacrifice is he referring to – Christ’s on the cross, or his own sacrificial service as an apostle?
- The significance of the parallel in 1 Cor 1:18 of “among those who are being saved and among those who are being destroyed” (ἐν τοῖς σωζόμενοι καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀπολλησµένοις).

\(^{18}\) It is common for standard translations to translate the ὀμη in 2:14 as “fragrance” (NAB and TNIV have “aroma”). There is a mixture of translations for the ἐνωδία in 2:15, but the most common is “aroma”: RSV, NIV, NAB, NRSV, TNIV (NJB has “fragrance”; and the NEB/REB have “incense”). With the two uses of ὀμη in 2:16 there is a range of translations, with some using the same English word for both occurrences and others using two different English words to reflect firstly the negative use and then the positive use of ὀμη: RSV/NRSV have “fragrance from death to death … fragrance from life to life”; NEB/REB have “deadly fume that kills … vital fragrance that brings life”; NIV/TNIV have “smell of death … fragrance of life”; NJB has “smell of death leading to death … smell of life leading to life”.
• The meaning of the phrases “stench of death leading to death” and “perfume of life leading to life” (ὁσμὴ ἐκ θανάτου εἰς θανάτον ... ὡς ἐκ ζωῆς εἰς ζωήν).

**Incense in the Roman Triumphal Procession**

Roman triumphal processions were not only political events, but were, in a very real sense, religious events. The procession concluded at the temple of Jupiter with the offering of sacrifices (Kistemaker, 1997, p 90). The burning of incense, as with other religious events, was part of the whole sensory experience. 19 Barrett (1973, p 98) goes as far as to say that this is the “best explanation of the new figure”, though does go on to see a shift to the sacrificial language of the OT. Similarly, while acknowledging a shift to cultic imagery in 2:15, Harris (2005, p 246) argues that,

Since φανεροῦτα is coordinate with θριαμβεύωντα, both being present participles describing God’s continuous action, it is fair to assume that τὴν ὡς κτλ. (v.14b) should be understood against the same background as v. 14a, the Roman triumph.

Cautiously, Barnett (1997, p 151) maintains that “the use in context of θριαμβεύω with ὡς appears to demand some allusive connection of this kind, despite the Levitical/cultic use of ὡς in the LXX and elsewhere in Paul”. Going one step further, Martin (1986, p 47) points out that this would fit with ὡς being “understood as εἰς θάνατον, leading to death for prisoners, and εἰς ζωήν, leading to life for the victorious army”, but acknowledges that “the evidence for this practice is weak”. A possible link with εἰς θάνατον and εἰς ζωήν is also noted by Kistemaker (1997, p 91), who draws attention to the fact that “the victorious general would determine who of the captives would be spared and who would be

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19 The burning of incense during a Roman triumphal procession is also noted by Belleville (1996, p 83), Collange (1972, p 29), Hughes (1962, p 78) and Thrall (1994, p 197).
executed”, but also points out that “we should not press the imagery beyond its limits”.

Wisdom as Fragrance

In Sirach 24:15 wisdom is referred to as an aroma, “I gave forth perfume … I spread my fragrance” (NRSV; ὁμίῃ ... εὐωδίᾳ). Wisdom can be seen as parallel to “the aroma of the knowledge of him” (2 Cor 2:14) that is made known everywhere. As wisdom is spread like an aroma, so the knowledge of Christ (or of God) is spread abroad. While this fits with the image of 2:14, it is more difficult to see how it fits with the image of 2:15 that sets out two possible responses and subsequent results.

Manson (cited in Martin, 1986, p 48) appeals to rabbinic literature where the Torah is likened to medicine or a drug that, depending on the circumstances and the attitude of the recipient, can have either positive or negative results. For those who have contact with the Torah, it can be either an “elixir of life” or a “deadly poison”. Paul, then, is using a similar image to describe the two possible

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21 There is discussion as to whether the genitive “knowledge of him” (αὐτοῦ) refers to God or to Christ. For example Furnish (1984, p 176) argues that “the reference to God is made probable by 4:6 (the enlightenment coming from the knowledge of the splendor of God), where the whole thought is closely parallel to that in the present verse”. He does, however, acknowledge that “it is also clear from 4:6 that Christ is the one through whom the knowledge of God is disclosed”. Lambrecht (1999, p 39) comes to a similar conclusion, but with minimal explanation. In contrast, Barnett (1997, p 149) concludes that “because the αὐτοῦ is between ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ and Χριστοῦ εὐωδίᾳ, it is more probably the ‘knowledge of Christ’ rather than the ‘knowledge of God’ that is in Paul’s mind” (emphasis original). But again he acknowledges the possibility of the alternative and the interrelatedness of the two: “nonetheless, the ‘knowledge of [Christ]’ is the means to the ‘knowledge of [God]’ (see 4:4, 6)”. Similarly, Harris (2005, p 247) notes that elsewhere Paul speaks of Christians having a knowledge both of God and of Christ, but comments that, “in favour of a reference to Christ is the following expression, Χριστοῦ εὐωδίᾳ (“the sweet fragrance of Christ,” v. 15a), and the fact that in v. 14 Χριστῷ is a nearer antecedent than θεῷ. Perhaps Paul wrote αὐτοῦ to avoid a repetitious Χριστῷ ... Χριστοῦ ... Χριστοῦ.”
responses and effects of the gospel. If the link from “perfume” to “medicine” is valid, then this may be the image Paul had in mind.

Furnish also argues that the image of fragrance as wisdom fits the context of 2 Cor 2:14-15, as the aroma is not rising to God as in a sacrificial context, but is being “disseminated throughout the world” (1984, p 188). He argues that “Paul is not thinking about a scent which benefits God, but about one which is wafted over the world for the benefit of God’s people (among those who are being saved, etc.)” (1984, p 177). In his opinion, “Paul is using the image of a fragrance with reference to the presence and therefore the knowledge of God” (1984, p 188, emphasis original), and that this conforms to the pattern of texts where Wisdom is spoken of in this manner.

**OT Image of Incense/Sacrifice**

The words ὀμή and εὐωδία are commonly used together as a hendiadys in the LXX in sacrificial contexts²² with the sense of “a pleasing odour of sacrifice acceptable to God”. There are also two examples in the NT: Eph 5:2 and Phil 4:18. In both these cases the phrase is in close proximity to the word θυσία, “sacrifice”. It has been objected that only ὀμή is used in 2 Cor 2:14, and that as this word is not used on its own in sacrificial contexts in the LXX, it does not have a sacrificial nuance here. But, as Thrall points out (1994, p 198): “in view of the occurrence of εὐωδία in the following verse this is scarcely a substantial objection: indeed, the juxtaposition of the two words may itself indicate Paul’s train of

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²² The following have both words ὀμή and εὐωδία together: Gen 8:21; Exod 29:18, 25, 41; Lev 1:9, 13, 17; 2:2 2:9; 3:5, 11, 16; 4:31; 6:8, 14, 21, 28; 17:4, 6; 23:13, 18; Num 15:3, 5, 7, 10, 13, 14, 24; 18:17; 28:2, 6, 8, 13, 24, 27; 29:2, 6, 8, 11, 13, 36; Ezek 6:13; 16:19; 20:28, 41; Jdt 16:16; Sir 50:15.
thought”.^{23} Additionally, in contrast to ὀμή, which when used alone retains its basic meaning of “aroma”, “odour”, “fragrance” or “scent” without sacrificial connotations, there are a number of references where εὐωδία on its own is used in a sacrificial context.^{24} Therefore, it can be argued that at least in 2 Cor 2:15, if not in 2:14, Paul has a sacrificial meaning in mind.

There is, however, ongoing debate as to whether or not the image – as Paul used it – should be understood sacrificially. For example, Barrett (1973, p 99) comments that “Its meaning can hardly be other than sacrificial here”, while Furnish (1984, p 187) says, “It is improbable that Paul’s description of the gospel as a fragrance is intended to evoke the idea of a sacrificial offering” (emphasis original).

The difference of opinion appears to revolve around the issue of the function of the aroma or fragrance, and the direction in which it wafts. In similar fashion to Furnish,^{25} Watson (1993, p 22) comments that “the thrust of the passage seems to be horizontal rather the vertical”. The argument is that the aroma of a sacrifice rose to God, but because, in this case, the aroma is “made known through us in every place”, it is inappropriate to understand this aroma in terms of sacrifice.

In contrast, both Barrett (1973, p 99) and Barnett (1997, pp 152-153) suggest that the aroma has both a vertical and a horizontal effect. The τὴν ὀμὴν τῆς γνώσεως αὐτοῦ φανεροῦντι δι’ ἡμῶν ἐν πάντι τῷπω (“aroma of the knowledge of him is made known through us in every place”) of 2:14b is rephrased in 2:15a as

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^{23} This is not without precedent; as noted above, Sir 24:15 uses both words separately as synonyms.

^{24} The following have εὐωδία alone in a sacrificial context: Ezra 6:10; Sir 35:5; 38:11; 45:18; Bar 5:8; 1 Esdr 1:13.

^{25} See above
“fragrance of Christ” is clearly a synonym for, or at least a parallel to, “the aroma of the knowledge of him”. While “fragrance of Christ” is described as “to God”, a vertical effect, “aroma of the knowledge of him” is made known “in every place”, a horizontal effect. Furthermore, 2:15b goes on to elaborate on “fragrance of Christ to God” in terms of its effects on people as being ἐν τοῖς σωζόμενοις καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις, “among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing”.

Conclusions regarding Source of the Image

Each of these possible sources for the image of “aroma”/“fragrance” has merit. The juxtaposition of θριαμβεύω and ὀμή makes the possibility that the “aroma” in 2:14b is a reference to the incense burned in the context of a Roman triumphal procession difficult to disprove. Similarly, that it is the aroma “of the knowledge of him”, makes the link with Wisdom a distinct possibility. And the overwhelming evidence of ὀμή and εὐωδία being used as a hendiadys in the LXX in sacrificial contexts, the example of the two words being used as synonyms, the evidence of εὐωδία being used on its own in sacrificial contexts, and Paul’s knowledge of the LXX and use of these words elsewhere, cumulatively build up a strong case for concluding that the close proximity of the two words in this passage is not accidental, but does, in some way, allude to LXX usage and a sacrificial context. Thrall (1994, p 207) concludes that:

It seems then, that Paul’s image is complex in origin, deriving from ideas of sacrifice, Torah, and Wisdom, and combining motifs from each. These motifs run throughout vv. 14b-16ab and predominate, whether or not subsidiary motifs, such as the triumphal image in v. 14a, also play some part.
It is, perhaps, profitable in the quest to determine the source of the “aroma”/“fragrance” images, to consider the flow of images. As Hafemann (1990a, pp 37-38) notes, there have been a number of suggestions. Firstly, it has been suggested that 2:14b is a Hellenistic reference to incense, with 2:15a being a Jewish reference to sacrifice. This gives continuity throughout 2:14, but discontinuity between 2:14 and 2:15. Similarly, if 2:14b and 2:15a are both understood as Jewish references to sacrifice, there is continuity between these two phrases, but discontinuity between the two parts of 2:14. And if all are non-sacrificial references to fragrance, then there is continuity throughout, but the sacrificial imagery that use of the words in the LXX strongly suggests, is lost.

Rather than focusing on points of continuity or discontinuity, it may be better to view the passage as a progression of ideas, each of which triggered the next, but with a shift in emphasis. So the image of being led in triumphal procession triggered the memory of the incense that was burned in such processions, the smell of which was pervasive. Out of this arose the comment that “he makes known through us the aroma of the knowledge of him in every place”. The use of the word “aroma” (ὀζμή), in turn, caused Paul to think of the association of “aroma” with “Wisdom”, thus “the aroma of the knowledge of him”. But “aroma” also reminded him of the sacrificial nuance the word has in the LXX, particularly in relation to “fragrance” (εὐωδία), leading him to go on to use this word in the following verse. It is then the combination of ideas – the pervasive odour of incense, Wisdom or the knowledge of God as an aroma, and the depiction of aroma as a sacrifice acceptable to God – that caused Paul to reflect on
two mutually exclusive responses to such an “aroma”, and the subsequent outcomes of those responses.

**Christ’s Sacrifice or Paul’s?**

If Paul is using the “aroma” metaphor with a sacrificial nuance, it is implicit rather than explicit, particularly with regard to whose sacrifice he is referring to. The phrase “we are the fragrance of Christ to God” (Χριστοῦ εὐωδία ἐσμέν τῷ θεῷ) is a key one. Because Paul, as an apostle, sees himself as the fragrance of Christ to God, it would seem that it is Christ who is the acceptable sacrifice and Paul is the fragrance that arises from that sacrifice.

The sacrifice is the crucified Christ (2:15a), whose death is the foundation of salvation. Paul then presents himself as the aroma of this sacrifice. Those who could not see a sacrifice taking place became aware of it through the odour. Similarly those who did not know of Christ’s sacrificial death became aware of it through Paul and his collaborators (Murphy-O’Connor, 1991, p 30).

However, while it can be reasoned from the NT that Christ’s death was an acceptable sacrifice (cf. Eph 5:21; 1 John 2:1-2; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 3:18; Rom 8:3), it is not clear that this is what Paul is asserting here. It is, perhaps, that he is alluding to his own ministry as a sacrifice that is acceptable to God. This would fit with a number of Paul’s comments, including his thanksgiving in this passage that “God, in Christ, always leads us as captives in his triumphal procession” (2:14) and his later statement that he is “always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake” (4:11). A related expression is present in Rom 15:16, where Paul describes his ministry among the Gentiles as a “priestly service of the gospel of God” (ἱερουργοῦντα τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ), that makes the offering of the Gentiles acceptable.
A merging of these images sees Paul’s sacrificial service as in continuity with Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. It is Christ’s sacrificial death that forms the paradigm for Paul’s sacrificial ministry. This is certainly in accord with 2 Cor 13:4 where Paul applies the fact that Christ was “crucified as a result of weakness, but lives as a result of God’s power” to his own ministry among the Corinthians such that he claims, “so we also, in our dealings with you, share in his weakness, but we will live with him as a result of God’s power”. Here Christ’s death and resurrection are undoubtedly the paradigm for Paul’s ministry.

**Two Responses – Two Outcomes**

With the two pairs of phrases, “those who are being saved … those who are perishing” and “a stench from death to death … a perfume from life to life”, Paul contrasted the two possible outcomes resulting from two possible responses. With his statement in 2:15, “we are the fragrance of Christ to God”, Paul identified himself, that is, his own person and people’s response to him, with the dual responses and outcomes. This concept is extended in 2:16a,b. However, in 2:14 he had described the “aroma that comes from the knowledge of him” as being spread “through us”, suggesting the aroma is the message that is proclaimed by him, although as Hafemann (1990a, p 51) points out, Paul is the subject of 2:14-16b and the subject of proclamation is not introduced until 2:17. An unambiguous statement regarding the “message of the cross” is made in 1 Cor 1:18, where the same phrases as in 2 Cor 2:15 “those who are being saved … those who are perishing (τοὶς σωζόμενοις … τοὶς ἀπολλυόμενοις)” occur, being used to describe the responses to that message. The following table indicates the connections between 2 Cor 2:14b-16b and 1 Cor 1:18:
While some of the phrases in these verses are difficult to define exactly, the general idea is apparent. The participles “being saved” (σωζόμενος) and “perishing” (ἀπολλυόμενος) patently have eschatological nuances, but the use of the present tense, indicates that in some respect at least, Paul regards them both as a current reality. And the phrases ἐκ θανάτου εἰς θάνατον (lit. “from death into death”) and ἐκ ζωῆς εἰς ζωήν (lit. “from life into life”) are notoriously difficult to translate – a task that is complicated by textual variants. But the point that the aroma can have one of two outcomes – that acceptance results in life and rejection results in death – is clear. Additionally, the chiastic structure of 2 Cor 2:15b-16b which mentions “being saved”/“life” first and last, and the structure of 1 Cor 1:18 which concludes with “being saved” and “the power of God”, place the emphasis on “life” as the preferred outcome, but do acknowledge that for some the outcome is “death”. As Barnett (1997, pp 154-155) concludes:

The references to “death” and “life” point to the death and resurrection of Christ, as in “the gospel of Christ” that Paul proclaims wherever he goes

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26 The ἐκ is omitted by the majority of manuscripts. Those that have it include: D, N, A, B, C. The omission makes for an easier translation, but the principle of lectio difficilior suggests it is original and so should be considered in a translation. If its presence is accepted, then it is a matter of exegesis to determine its meaning. Suggestions for the meaning of the ἐκ … ἐς construction usually fall into one of the following categories (with some variations): (1) a superlative, “ultimate death … ultimate life” (2) a progression “coming from death and resulting in death…”, where death (or life) becomes increasingly entrenched in the person. Parallels with the same construction in Rom 1:17; Ps 83:8 LXX; Jer 9:3 LXX and the similar constructions in 2 Cor 3:18; 4:17 are frequently cited, but the meanings of these are not undisputed, resulting in the parallels being less than conclusive for the meaning of 2 Cor 2:16 (Barnett, 1997, p 154; Belleville, 1996, pp 83-83; Furnish, 1984, p 177; Martin, 1986, p 44).
As highlighted by Barnett’s comments, a comparison of the various statements within these two biblical passages supports a unity between the message and the messenger. On the one hand, those for whom the “message of the cross” is the “power of God”, are those who are “being saved”, a description also applied to those who accept Paul as the “fragrance of Christ”, resulting in a “perfume from life to life”. On the other hand, those for whom the “message of the cross” is “stupidity”, are “perishing”, a description applied similarly to those who reject Paul as the “fragrance of Christ”, resulting in a “stench from death to death”. One’s response to the message of the cross, and thus to the one who proclaims that message, places one in either of these two groups. There is no third option.

But there is also a congruity of method of proclamation and way of life of the one who proclaims it. The life of the one who proclaims the message as well as the way in which they proclaim it, must be congruent with the message itself, the message of the cross. In 1 Cor 1:17 Paul described how he was to proclaim the message. It was not to be with eloquent wisdom (οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου; lit. “not in wisdom of speech”). To proclaim it in such a way would be to empty the cross of its power; Paul’s eloquent speech rather than the power of the cross would be given the credit for success. Paul made a similar statement in 1 Cor 2:1-5, where he again disavowed the use of eloquent wisdom (οὐ καθ’ ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἡ σοφίᾳ … οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίᾳ [λόγοις] lit. “not according to superior
speech/words or wisdom … not in persuasive wise speech/words”). In this passage he also hinted that the paradigm of the cross not only impacts the way the message is proclaimed, but also the life of the proclaimer. He stated that he “came in weakness and in fear and with much trembling”. While “fear” and “much trembling” may be regarded as referring simply to the method, or at least the context, of proclamation, his use of the word “weakness” (παθέναι) suggests a wider relevance. That the paradigm of the cross extends to the manner of life of the one who proclaims the message of the cross is made explicit in 2 Cor 2:14-16. It was as Paul was led to death as a captive in God’s triumphal procession that he became the means through which “the aroma of knowledge of God was spread in every place”; that Paul “became the fragrance of Christ to God”. “It is Paul as the proclaimer of Christ crucified, and who as a consequence suffers, who is the aroma of Christ” (Barnett, 1997, p 153, emphasis original).

The message of the cross, the manner in which it is proclaimed, and the lifestyle of the person who proclaims it, must all fit the same pattern. Thus, Paul’s suffering for the sake of the gospel, far from invalidating his standing as an apostle, actually endorsed it. It was because he suffered, because he proclaimed the gospel in the power of God rather than with eloquent human wisdom, that his apostleship was valid. As Hafemann (1990a, pp 46-47) sums it up:

Paul’s revelatory function is grounded in the fact that in his suffering he preaches and acts in the Spirit, and that in the midst of his being led to death the Spirit is poured out on others to bring them to life in Christ. … In the light of the continuation of Paul’s thought in 2:17, however, it must also be emphasized that Paul’s apostolic role of “being led to death” (in Christ) in order to reveal the knowledge of God spoken of in 2:14-16a cannot be separated from his call to preach the word of God (in Christ) spoken of in 2:17 (emphasis original).
Competency and Commendation (2 Corinthians 2:16c-3:6)

A number of circumstances conspire to cause Paul to address the issue of competency or sufficiency (ικανότης and cognates). Firstly, he had just elaborated on what was involved in the task of being the “fragrance of Christ to God”, of being the means through which the knowledge of God was spread abroad. It meant being led as a captive to death, an overwhelming prospect for anyone. Secondly, there was the gravity of the consequences of people’s response, both to the message and the messenger. And thirdly, against the background of the criticism coming from Corinth and the questions regarding his reliability, honesty, authority, authenticity and legitimacy as an apostle, such a topic begs an answer.

Who is sufficient for these things? (2 Corinthians 2:16c)

Paul introduced the theme with the rhetorical question, “Who is sufficient for these things?” He did not directly answer the question, though he did immediately go on to contrast himself and his ministry with that of “so many” others (2:17). And he came back to the topic of “sufficiency”, declaring that his sufficiency came not from himself, but from God (3:5-6). This has led to much debate as to whether the implied answer to the rhetorical question is in the affirmative or negative, that is, whether Paul intended the answer to be understood as “I am sufficient” or “No one is sufficient”.

27 The noun ικανός is used in 2:16 and 3:5. It is variously translated as “sufficient”, “competent”, “adequate”, “qualified”. The related noun ικανότης is used in 3:5 and can be translated “sufficiency”, “competency”, “adequacy”, “qualification”, referring to “the state of being qualified or adequate”. The corresponding verb ικανοῦω occurs in 3:6 with the meaning “cause to be adequate, make sufficient, qualify” (BDAG, 2000, p 472a-473a). While a variety of English words can, and are, used, it should be kept in mind that they all translate the group of words with the ικαν- root.
Representing one side of the debate is Belleville’s comment (1996, p 84): “The expected answer is a resounding ‘no one’ in and of themselves.” The question is understood in the light of Paul’s latter comment that his sufficiency comes from God. Thus, here he is understood to be denying self-sufficiency. The denial of self-sufficiency is seen against the background of the Corinthians questioning Paul’s sufficiency and the presence of others who do claim sufficiency. As Barrett (1973, p 103) concludes:

[T]he question, Who is sufficient for these things? implies the answer, No one is – certainly I am not. This makes the opening of the next verse intelligible. I make no claim to self-sufficiency, for we are not, like the majority, watering down the word of God. It is only those who do this who can claim to be self-sufficient; those who handle the word of God in its purity know how inadequate they are for the task (emphasis original).

This view interprets the rhetorical question as if it was, “Who is sufficient for these things in and of themselves?” But the question simply is “Who is sufficient for these things? (καὶ πρὸς ταῦτα τίς ἰκανός;)” It can only be interpreted as asking about self-sufficiency if ἰκανός inherently implies self-sufficiency. But consideration of other NT uses, the use in the LXX and the use in non-biblical literature, shows that ἰκανός only has the neutral sense of “sufficiency”, “adequacy”, “competency”, “capability” or “qualification”. It does not inherently have a negative connotation such as self-sufficiency (Fallon, 1983, pp 370-372; Hafemann, 1990a, p 90).

Support for a negative answer to Paul’s rhetorical question is also often drawn from the parallel in Joel 2:11, καὶ τίς ἐσταν ἰκανός αὐτῇ, “and who is sufficient for it?” (NRSV: “Who can endure it?”), that is, the Day of the Lord, God’s

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judgement. The implied answer is “No one!” However, while elsewhere (e.g. 1 Cor 4:1-5; 2 Cor 5:9-11) Paul does emphasise evaluation by God at the final judgement, it is not sufficiency at the final judgement that is in focus in this passage, but sufficiency for ministry in the present (Fallon, 1983, p 373; Hafemann, 1990a, pp 91-92). And rather than the resignation in the face of God’s judgement that is expressed by Joel, Paul, in his writings, consistently expressed hope and confidence. In the immediate context this is illustrated by his statements that his ministry is “from God and in God’s presence” (2:17) and that he has confidence before God (3:4) because his sufficiency comes from God (3:5) (Barnett, 1997, p 155; Hafemann, 1990a, pp 92-93).

In contrast, the other side of the debate is represented by Garland (1989-90, p 24): “Therefore, Paul’s answer to his question in 2:16, ‘Who is sufficient for these things?’ is that he is, but only through the grace of God” (emphasis original), and Murphy-O’Connor (1991, p 31): “How should it be answered? Obviously, in the affirmative, as the following verse indicates”. These two quotations highlight the two major reasons given for arguing that Paul intends an affirmative answer: (1) that he is sufficient because God has made him sufficient; and (2) the context and grammatical structure of the following verses depend on an affirmative answer.

Paul makes it clear (2:17) that his ministry is carried out with sincerity (ἐξ ἐλεήμονος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν), that he speaks as one sent from God (ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἔστηκεν) and 29 Others who argue that the question is intended to be answered in the affirmative include Barnett, (1997, p 155); Fee (1994, p 298); Hafemann (1989, p 335; 1990a, pp 85-94; 2000, pp 112-113); Thrall (1994, p 209) and Witherington (1995, p 374). Harris (2005, p 253) acknowledges the possibility of either a negative or an affirmative answer, but favours the affirmative.
that he is accountable to God because his ministry is carried out in the presence of God (κατέναντι θεοῦ). Thus, through Christ (διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ; 3:4), he carries out his ministry with confidence (πεποίθησιν δὲ τοιαύτην ἐχομεν; 3:4), in the knowledge that his competency for ministry does not come from himself (οὐχ ὅτι ἀφ’ ἑαυτῶν ἴκανοί ἐσμέν; 3:5) but comes from God (ἀλλ’ ἣ ἴκανότης ἡμῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ; 3:5) because God has made him competent to be a minister of the new covenant (δὲ καὶ ἴκανωσεν ἡμᾶς διακόνους καινῆς διαθήκης; 3:6). Cumulatively, this supports the hypothesis that Paul intended a positive response to his question, “Who is sufficient for these things?”

The possible allusion to the call of Moses can be used as support for this view. The LXX translates Moses’ response that he was not eloquent as οὐχ ἴκανός εἰμι (‘I am not sufficient/competent’; Exod 4:10). God’s response is to make Moses sufficient for the task. Just as Moses’ sufficiency came from God, so did Paul’s. Whether this was specifically in Paul’s mind is unclear. However, that Paul would later (3:7-18) go on to provide an extended comparison between himself as a minister of the new covenant and Moses as a minister of the old covenant (Hafeman, 1990, pp 94-97; 2000, p 113; Garland, 1989-90, p 24), suggests that it may have been in his mind at this point.

This first reason, that his sufficiency comes from God, leads into the second, the structure of the argument. To state that his “sufficiency” comes from God (4:5-6), it is argued, presupposes that he has such “sufficiency”, hence the answer to the question (2:16c), “Who is sufficient for these things?” must be “I am.” It is also argued that while the allusion to Moses in 2:16c is, at best, implicit, the structure
of the argument in the following verses, beginning with 2:17, is explicit. Paul is adequate, because unlike those who were “peddlers of God’s word”, his ministry was from God and was authenticated by God. Such a statement would raise the question of whether he was simply commending himself, thus Paul addressed this question in 3:1-3. However, a decision regarding how the structure of the following argument supports the thesis that Paul intended a positive answer to his rhetorical question, if in fact it does, must be held in abeyance until this examination of 2:17-3:6 is complete.

While commentators disagree regarding whether the rhetorical question, “Who is sufficient/competent/adequate/qualified for these things?” should be answered in the negative or the affirmative, there is one thing upon which there is universal agreement: the competency for Paul’s ministry, and thus the ministry of all ministers of Christ, can only come from God. In and of oneself no one is sufficient. It is only by the grace of God, it is only with God’s sufficiency that anyone is able to function adequately in ministry. As Garland (1999, p 150) summarises:

No human being could ever hope to be sufficient in himself for such a trust. Nevertheless, Paul implies that he is fully sufficient for these things, but only by the grace of God. His own afflictions in God’s service have taught him that he cannot rely on himself but only on God, who raises the dead.

Once again the theme of divine power versus human power is raised. The quotation of Garland’s above highlights the link to the same theme in 1:9; but there is also a link to the theme in 12:9. In whatever way 2:16c is specifically understood – whether the rhetorical question is understood to be intended to be answered affirmatively or negatively – it is undeniable that sufficiency for
ministry comes “from God”. This is not only congruent with a traditional understanding of 12:9, that “power is made perfect in weakness”, but is in fact even more akin to the interpretation put forward in this work, that is, that “power is brought to an end in weakness”. Understood this way, it was when Paul’s own power was brought to an end in the weakness of the “thorn in the flesh” that ministry took place in God’s power. It is also congruent with Paul’s paradigm for ministry that is modelled on Christ. Just as Christ was crucified “as a result of weakness” but was raised “as a result of God’s power”, so too, Paul shared in Christ’s weakness and so his ministry was “as a result of God’s power” (13:4). In 2:14-16, it was in the suffering, in the weakness of being led as a captive in God’s triumphal procession, that Paul had been able to become the “fragrance of Christ”, that through him the “aroma of the knowledge of [Christ/God]” was spread everywhere, and that he was confirmed as “sufficient” for ministry.

“Peddlers” of the Word of God (2 Corinthians 2:17)

In 2:17 a polemical edge enters Paul’s argument as he refers to “the many” who are “peddlers of God’s word”. While there is some debate about exactly who Paul was referring to with οἱ πολλοί, and whether it should be translated “many” or “the majority”, it would seem that he had in mind those teachers who had come to Corinth and were disparaging Paul’s lifestyle and methods, and thus his message.

There is also some debate as to exactly what his accusation against them is in this verse. Plummer (1915, p 73), following the Vulgate which has adulterantes here for κατηλεύωντες, as well as for δολοῦντες in 4:2, translates κατηλεύωντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ as “adulterating the word of God”. While he notes that this
implies “the corruption is done for the sake of some miserable personal gain”, the emphasis is on the “corruption”, the “adulterating” of the message. Windisch (1965, pp 604-605) gives the primary meaning in the NT as “to offer for money the word concerning God which is entrusted to the missionary”, and gives the secondary meaning as “to falsify the word (as the κατηλούω purchases pure wine and then adulterates it with water) by making additions.” He also draws attention to μη δολούντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ (“not falsifying the word of God”) in 4:2 and implies a parallel.

Both Plummer (1915) and Windisch (1965) are cited by numerous commentators, with the result that the overwhelming majority state that καπηλεύω means both to sell and to falsify, adulterate or water down. The statement in 4:2 regarding not falsifying the word of God is frequently cited as a parallel, with καπηλεύω being regarded as a virtual synonym for δολούω (distort, falsify, adulterate).

There are, however, a small number of commentators who dispute that καπηλεύω includes the meaning “adulterate”. So Bultmann (1985, p 69) maintains that “the term was current in the figurative sense for hawking spiritual goods, for ‘dealing in,’ that is, teaching philosophy, offering spiritual goods, etc. for the sake of material gain and not for the essential reasons”. He concludes that, “καπηλεύοντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ, therefore, does not mean to falsify the preaching, but to make capital from it”. Hafemann re-examines the data and comes to the following conclusion (1990, pp 123-124):^{30}

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^{30} In his 1989-90 article (p 23), Garland notes that “Paul may be alluding to the peddler’s tendency to adulterate the product to cheat the buyer”, but also says “he may be implying that they have simply reduced preaching the gospel to a trade”. However, in his 1999 article (p 152) he is much
Our investigation of the use of *kapēlos/kapēleuein* in the polemic against the Sophists and its attestation in Hellenistic Judaism thus leads to two important conclusions. First, to my knowledge, there is no evidence that this word-group ever directly signified the idea of “watering down,” “adulterating,” or “falsifying” or that these ideas were ever present as part of the wider semantic field of the verb. When the idea of “adulterating,” etc., is present in association with the verb “to sell as a retailer,” it is not signified by the verb itself, but by an *additional* verbal statement … and by a *contrast* with the ideal practice, exemplified in those with whom the ones “selling” their wares/teaching are compared. … Second, … it is clear that this market motif, when used in a transferred sense in reference to the practice of selling one’s teaching, always carries an additional *negative nuance*, although the precise nature of this negative connotation is by no means uniform, but can vary given the particular nature of the critique intended by the author (emphasis original).

While Paul’s assertion in 4:2 that he did not “distort” or “falsify” the word of God does imply that he believed others did, as does his reference in 11:4 to those who proclaim a “different gospel”, it is argued that in 2:17 that is not the specific charge. Instead, the emphasis is on the aspect of monetary gain.

Hafemann’s research (1990a, pp 99-125) indicates that the meaning of *kapēleuō* does not include “adulterating” the message. But that research also indicates that the use of this verb did signify some form of criticism of those about whom it was used. The comparison that Paul made between these “peddlers” and himself shows that he did intend to criticise them beyond simply saying they earned their living from preaching the gospel. In some way he was calling their integrity into question.

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stronger and states that “the word translated “peddle” (*kapēleuō*) by the NIV does not mean ‘to corrupt,” “to water down,” “to falsify”’. Belleville (1996, pp 85-86) and Murphy-O’Connor (1991, pp 31-32) both mention the money-making motivation without specifically mentioning “adulterating” the message. Witherington (1995, p 373) follows Hafemann’s argument, labelling these “peddlers” as “profiteers”.
It was well known in Corinth that Paul did not accept money from them; in fact it was a matter of some heated discussion between Paul and the Corinthian congregation (cf. 1 Cor 9:1-18; 2 Cor 11:7-11; 12:13). But rather than being an indication of Paul’s inadequacy as an apostle, it was in fact a sign of his love for them and evidence that he carried out his calling with sincerity. That his integrity was intact, while that of “the many” was not, supports the argument that he intended his rhetorical question in 2:16c to be answered in the affirmative; he was sufficient to the apostolic calling, unlike those who preached the gospel simply for monetary gain.

**Self-commendation and Letters of Commendation (2 Corinthians 3:1-3)**

If then, Paul was making claim to be sufficient for ministry, in contrast to others, the objection that he was recommending himself becomes a natural one for the Corinthians to have raised. Thus, in anticipation of their objection, Paul introduced the issue (3:1) in the form of two rhetorical questions: “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you?” Clearly Paul presumed a negative answer. The questions were intended to prevent the Corinthians from coming to the false conclusion that Paul was engaging in unsubstantiated self-commendation. “Some” (περικο) apparently did engage in self-commendation and did have letters of recommendation from others. That Paul had to defend himself and his competency for ministry, suggests that those with letters of

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31 Formally, the first question may be understood as an open question with no explicit indication of either a required “yes” or a required “no” answer. However, the use of μὴ in the second question means that question expects a negative answer. As this question begins with ἢ (“or”), which is often used “to introduce a question which is parallel to a preceding one or supplements it” (BDAG, 2000, p 432b; 2 Cor 3:1 cited as an example), both questions should be understood as anticipating a negative answer.
recommendation were calling into question Paul’s validity because he did not have such letters, and that the Corinthian congregation had come to view commendatory letters as vitally important. The underlying question is what legitimates Paul’s apostolic ministry. Is it valid simply because he says it is? Is it valid because someone else says it is?

Paul’s reply was that he did, in fact, have a letter of recommendation: the Corinthians themselves. The proof of his sufficiency as an apostle was the existence of the Corinthian church. This was not the first time Paul had made this sort of assertion. In 1 Cor 9:2 he had already told them that they were “the seal of my apostleship in the Lord”. And he would later comment that they should have been the ones commending him (ὑψιστάσθαι; 2 Cor 12:11) because he was not inferior to the “super-apostles” and this had been demonstrated by his ministry among them. In 1 Cor 9:2 they were his “seal”, in 2 Cor 3:2 they are his “letter [of recommendation]”, and in 2 Cor 12:11 they should have been “recommending” him. Their existence was all the proof he needed. Their

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32 There is some debate as to whether this “letter of recommendation” is written on “our hearts” (i.e. Paul’s heart – and perhaps that of his co-workers depending on how the plural is understood) or “your hearts” (i.e. the Corinthians’ hearts). “Our” (ἡμῶν) is better attested than “your” (ὑμῶν), but is the more difficult reading. A number of commentators argue that context indicates the “your” is the preferred reading, [including Barrett (1973, p 96); Bultmann (1985, p 71); Martin (1986, p 44); Murphy-O’Connor (1991, p 32); Provence (1982, p 60); Thrall (1994, pp 223-224)] while others argue that the “our”, being both better attested and the more difficult reading, must be the correct one [including Barnett (1997, p 159); Belleville (1996, pp 88-89); Furnish (1984, p 181); Garland (1999, p 157); Hafemann (1990a pp 190-193); Harris (2005, p 253); Kistemaker (1997, p 101); Metzger (1994, p 509) and Witherington (1995, p 378)]. The decision depends on how either reading is understood to fit with Paul’s argument. The argument for “your” frequently rides on the question of how something written on Paul’s heart could be “known and read by all”, whereas something written on the Corinthians’ hearts would be known to them. However, it has been pointed out that a letter of recommendation is usually carried by the person it recommends, in this case, Paul. Because the letter consists of the Corinthians themselves, such a letter can be “known and read by all” – their existence is very public. The internal argument is close to evenly balanced, with Martin (1986, p 44) claiming that ὑμῶν “seems required by the context” and Metzger claiming that ἡμῶν “seems to be demanded by the context”. The external evidence favours ὑμῶν and this is the reading accepted here.
changed lives demonstrated the authenticity of his apostolic calling, status and authority.

As Hafemann (1990a, p 193) concludes, “Paul’s basic assertion in 3:2a (‘you are our letter’) is based on his self-understanding as the founder of the Corinthian community.” The perfect passive participle ἐγγραμμένη (“having been written”) points to a specific event in the past. That this event is the founding of the church in Corinth seems a reasonable conclusion. Hafemann does, however, take it a step further (1990a, pp 193-196), arguing that it is Paul’s suffering on behalf of the congregation, that can be seen by all. Paul’s decision not to accept support from the Corinthians (cf. 2:17) is but one aspect of this suffering. In spite of the seemingly awkward order, the present passive participles γνωσκόμενη καὶ ἀναγινωσκόμενη (“being known and being read”) point to an ongoing “reading” of this letter. Paul’s ongoing relationship with the Corinthians and his ongoing suffering on their behalf continues to be public knowledge.

Harris (2005, p 262) takes a slightly different approach, and while acknowledging that it is the Corinthians’ conversion that makes the letter noticeable, he argues that “engraved” on the “heart” signifies that the Corinthians were not only in Paul’s thoughts but in his “heart”, the centre of his personality (cf. 7:3). He concludes:

The “letter” was permanently open to examination (note two present participles) not only at Corinth where the Corinthians themselves lived out their newness of life in Christ. It was also available for universal inspection wherever Paul went with this heart-engraving and spoke of the faith and spiritual life of the Corinthians. … In both “places” – at Corinth and through Paul – the letter could be read by one and all.
In 3:3a the metaphor is shifted slightly and extended, primarily it would seem, for the purpose of clarification. Paul had described the Corinthians as “our letter, written on our hearts”; now he described them as “a letter of Christ, ministered by us”. He made it clear that neither he as the one who “ministered” the letter, nor the Corinthians who constitute the letter, were the source of the letter, for it was a “letter of Christ”. It was through Christ – through the Spirit as he would go on to say – that Paul proclaimed the gospel in Corinth, and it was through the power of the Spirit that the Corinthians responded to the gospel.

There is discussion as to what the verb “ministered” (διακονέω) signifies in this case. Does it mean that Paul was the writer of the letter or the deliverer of the letter, or some combination of both? Whatever the exact nuance Paul intended, two observations can be made. Firstly, διακονηθείσα (“having been ministered”) is an aorist participle, referring to a past event, most naturally interpreted as Paul’s proclaiming of the gospel in Corinth. Secondly, this is the first of a series of uses of the διακον- root. “Ministry” or “service” is a key theme in what follows, and Paul predominantly uses this group of words in relation to his apostolic ministry. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that this occurrence of διακονέω refers to Paul’s apostolic ministry in Corinth, in particular, his initial ministry of proclaiming the gospel which resulted in the formation of the Corinthian church.

In the remainder of 3:3, “written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God; not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts”, there is again a shift in,
and an extension of, the letter metaphor; one that has caused much debate and numerous interpretations. There are three major difficulties. Firstly, Paul had begun by contrasting the letters of recommendation carried by “some” (3:1) – presumably letters written on papyrus – with the Corinthians as a letter written on his heart (3:2). But in 3:3 the contrast is between a letter written on “tablets of stone” (πλαξίν λιθίνας) and one written on “tablets of hearts of flesh” or “tablets of human hearts” (πλαξίν καρδίαις σαρκίνας). Secondly, if 3:3b and 3:3c are taken as one contrast, then it is a contrast between a letter written with ink on stone and a letter written with the Spirit on human hearts. Thirdly, there is the matter of identifying the OT references alluded to and the significance of those allusions.

The contrasts of 3:3b and 3:3c have caused a number of commentators to despair of sorting out the apparent mixed metaphors. But as Hafemann (1990a, pp 206-207) has pointed out, progress towards understanding Paul’s argument can be made if the contrasts are taken as two separate contrasts. The first contrast, “written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God” is a contrast between two methods of writing. Human agency in writing with ink is contrasted with divine agency in writing with the Spirit. The second contrast, “not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” is a contrast between two locations of writing. If the second contrast is understood as an amplification of the first, then it describes the location of what is written “with the Spirit”, that is, what is written “with the Spirit” is written “on human hearts” not “on stone”. The point of contact between the two contrasts is that both describe the “writing” that is done “with the Spirit”. Thus in verse 3, Paul builds on what he had already said in
verse 2. The Corinthian church only exists because of the work of the Spirit which was ministered through Paul.

The two phrases “tablets of stone” and “tablets of human hearts” and the verb “written” or “engraved” (ἐγγραφεῖν) alert the reader to the presence of OT allusions, but do not clearly define them. “Tablets of stone” is an allusion to Law given to Moses on tablets of stone (Exod 24:12; 31:18; 32:15-16; 34:1, 4; Deut 4:13; 5:22; 9:9-11; Deut 10: 1, 3). The verb “engrave” logically fits with the giving of the Law on stone tablets, but the LXX consistently uses γράφει rather than ἐγγραφεῖ in passages relating to the giving of the Law.35 Suggestions for the source of “written … on tablets of human hearts” include Proverbs 3:3; 7:3; Jeremiah 31:33 (38:33 LXX); and Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26-27. Writing “on the tablet of the heart” is in both Proverbs references in the MT, but only in 7:3 in the LXX, while writing “on the heart” is mentioned in Jer 31:33 (38:33 LXX). However, in each case it is the Law rather than “a letter of Christ” that is written on the heart, and, unlike 2 Cor 3:3, there is no mention of the Spirit. In both Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26 there is the promise of a “heart of stone” being replaced with a “heart of flesh”, as well as the promise of being given a “new spirit”, so that the people will be able to keep God’s Law. But the “stone” in these references denotes the hardness of the peoples’ hearts rather than the stone tablets of the Law, as is the allusion in 2 Cor 3:3. Jeremiah 31:31-33 mentions a “new covenant”, a topic Paul will discuss at length, but which is not introduced in 2 Corinthians 3 until verse 6.

35 Deut 10:1-3 is an exception, with λαξεῖον being used in 10:1. However, in 10:2 it is again γράφει that is used.
It is possible that Paul specifically had some or all of these OT references in mind from the beginning, but it seems perhaps more likely that, just as in 2:14-16, one image has led to another. The possibility that some may have understood Paul to have been engaging in self-commendation in 2:16-17 raised the topic not only of self-commendation, but also of letters of recommendation. The mention of “letters” led Paul to think of the Corinthians as his letter of recommendation, not a letter written in ink on papyrus, but a letter written on his heart. Flowing out of this was the explanation that the Corinthians were not only his “letter of recommendation”, but in fact were a “letter of Christ”, which while having come into being as a result of Paul’s ministry, had actually been written with the Spirit. Mention of a letter written on the “heart” also triggered the contrast of “tablets of stone” with “tablets of hearts of flesh”, and in turn brought to mind the stone tablets the Law had been written on, as well as the promise of a new covenant. This then gave Paul the basis for his following discussion of the comparison of the old and new covenants and the ministry of those respective covenants.

**Competency that comes from God** (2 Corinthians 3:4-6)

The flow of Paul’s thought up to this point led him to make an affirmation of confidence. “*Such is our confidence*” (πεποίθησιν δὲ τοιαύτην ἐχομεν) alerts the reader to the fact that this was not simply a subjective feeling of confidence. Rather, it was confidence that was based on the objective facts previously stated. Paul could make this statement of confidence because the existence of the Corinthian church was evidence of his effectiveness as one who “spreads the aroma of the knowledge of him [Christ/God] in every place” (2:14).
But his confidence was also based on the fact that it was “through Christ” (διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ). His ministering the gospel to the Corinthians, and their resultant response, was because of his relationship with Christ. It was not a product of his doing, thus this was not an example of self-commendation or boasting. The confidence was also “towards God” or “before God”. It was in God’s presence, with God as witness, that he had such confidence.

The phrase διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ πρὸς τὸν θεόν (“through Christ, before God”), though with major components in reverse order, is reminiscent of the phrase in 2:17, κατέναντι θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ λαλοῦμεν (lit., “before/in the presence of God, in Christ we speak”). This acts as a clue that Paul was returning more directly to the question of his sufficiency, though this does not imply that the intervening verses had been unrelated. This is further reinforced by the fact that the phrase in 2:17 is immediately preceded by ὦς ἐκ θεοῦ (“as from God”); he functioned as one sent from God. Paul would go on to say in 3:5 that his sufficiency, his competency, was ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ (“from God”).

Paul’s confidence, then, was based on a combination of being sent by God, of ministering out of his relationship with Christ, and with God as his witness and before whom he would have to give account. The proof that this was, indeed, how he functioned, was the response of the Corinthians in accepting the gospel and becoming Christians.
Paul began 3:5 with οὐχ ὅτι… (“not that…”), a phrase that functions as a correction of a possible misunderstanding that his confidence, in spite of what he had said to the contrary, was simply unfounded self-commendation. While there are a variety of interpretations regarding the exact nuance of Paul’s statement, οὐχ ὅτι ἂφι ἑαυτῶν ἴκανοί ἐσμέν λογίσομαι τι ὡς ἕξ ἑαυτῶν (“not that we are competent of ourselves to consider anything as coming from us”), the basic thrust of it is unambiguous. The competency, sufficiency or qualification he had for ministry did not in any way come from himself; it came from God. Thrall (1994, pp 229-230) sums up both the thrust of the statement and the difficult phrasing like this:

Paul is not himself competent to consider anything (i.e., any part of his apostolic work) as deriving from his own resources. We would seem to have here a conflation of two ways of expressing the same basic thought: ‘I am not of myself adequate’, and ‘I do not regard anything as deriving from myself’… He had, then, no self-generated capacity for his apostolic task.

Paul’s lack of adequacy from his own resources is contrasted with the simple statement, ἀλλὰ ἴκανότης ἡμῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, “but our sufficiency is from God”.

Paul did have competence, but it was a competence that came from God and not from himself. Nevertheless, he felt the need to correct possible conclusions that he was engaging in self-commendation or that his confidence was unfounded self-confidence. This supports the conclusion that in 2:16c, Paul’s question, “Who is competent for such things?” was intended to be answered in the affirmative. Paul could be confident that he was indeed competent for the task of

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36 Harris (2005, pp 214, 267) argues that οὐχ ὅτι is “elliptical for either ἐστιν οὐχ ὅτι (‘It is not that…’ = ‘not as if’) or οὐ λέγω ὅτι (‘I am not saying that…’). He cites BAGD p 598a for the second option (the equivalent entry in BDAG is p 732a). Furnish (1984, pp 138, 183) gives other examples in 2 Corinthians as 1:24 and 7:9.
disseminating the “fragrance of Christ”, for this competency, this adequacy, came from God and not from himself.

There may well be an allusion here to the fact that in the LXX (Ruth 1:20-21; Job 21:15; 31:2; 40:2; Ezek 1:24[A]), (ὁ) ἰκανός is sometimes used as a divine title, “The Sufficient One”. Sufficiency for ministry comes not from the minister, but from “The Sufficient One” whom the minister serves.

Likewise, there may be an allusion to the call of Moses (Exod 3:1-4:17, esp. 4:10). Hafemann (1995, pp 39-62) argues strongly that there is not only an allusion to Moses, but also to the subsequent pattern of prophetic call, of which Gideon (Judg 6:11-24), Isaiah (Isa 6:1-8), Jeremiah (Jer 1:4-10) and Ezekiel (Ezek 1:1-3:11) are examples. As Hafemann (2000, p 127) summarises:

The prophet is not sufficient (competent) in himself (because of an obstacle to be overcome), but is nevertheless made sufficient by God’s grace. … Since the prophet is called like Moses, he can claim the same “sufficiency-in-spite-of-insufficiency-by-the grace of God” that Moses had. … Indeed, the call of Moses demonstrates that these very obstacles are an essential part of the call itself, illustrating clearly that God’s grace, not the prophet’s strength, is the source of his sufficiency.

If such allusions were Paul’s intention, they serve to reinforce his basic statement that his sufficiency came not from himself, but from God. It is also congruent with the argument of this work that it is in the “obstacles”, to use Hafemann’s word, that God’s power is operational. It is when, in the context of such an “obstacle”, human power is demonstrated to be null and void, that divine power is made manifest.

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37 This possible allusion is noted by a number of commentators including Barnett (1997, p 173); Furnish (1984, p 196); Harris (2005, 269); Martin (1986, p 53); and Thrall (1994, p 230).
38 Harris (2005, p 269) also notes the possibility.
The simple statement in 3:5 that Paul’s competency comes from God, is expanded in 3:6. The general statement of competency which comes from God is specifically applied to competency or qualification to be “ministers of a new covenant”. The verb in δέ καὶ ἵκανωσεν ἡμᾶς ("who also made us sufficient") is aorist, suggesting a past event. While Paul does refer to “us” (ἡμᾶς) rather than to “me”, and so may have included his associates, if specifically applied to Paul, this is most naturally understood as a reference to his conversion/call. In this commissioning, God had made Paul adequate to be a “minister” (διάκονος). This is the second use in this passage of a word from the διάκονος-root group of words. Traditionally this group of words has been translated as “to serve”/"service"/“servant” or “to minister"/“ministry”/“minister”. Based on a study of non-Christian sources Collins (1990, 73-191) argues that the core meaning of this group of words relates to being a “go-between” rather than simply being a “servant”. He concludes (1990, p 198) that in Paul’s use of the word here, there is an intimate and singular connection between this word and the announcement of God’s revelations; … it indicates Paul’s role as the authoritative mouthpiece of God, and for his readers has precise connotations of a person entrusted with God’s full message, charged with the duty to deliver it, and endowed with the right to be heard and believed.

Being a “minister”, then, was for Paul another way of repeating what he had already said, that he spoke as one “sent from God and in God’s sight” (2:17). And what Paul was a minister of, what he was “charged with the duty to deliver”, was the “new covenant”. In secular Greek διάθηκη was frequently used to refer to a person’s “last will and testament”, but was used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew יִתְנָה, so the range of meaning of יִתְנָה came to be attached to διάθηκη.

In relation to God, this was a covenant in which God stipulated the terms; it was

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39 Collins’ work is summarised in his 1992 Australian Biblical Review article (pp 34-44). Harris (2005, p 270) and Thrall (1994, pp 231-232) also provide brief summaries of Collins’ conclusions. Hafemann (1995, pp115-118) has an excursus discussing the meaning of the word group.
not an agreement between equals. And because this covenant was, in some way, “new”, it presupposed both the existence of a covenant that was “old” and the implicit superiority of the “new” over the “old”. The phrase (ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη) is used elsewhere in the NT of the Last Supper tradition (1 Cor 11:25; Luke 22:20; cf. Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24), where the cup is a symbol of the new covenant ratified by Jesus’ death. The phrase, however, went back to Jeremiah’s prophecy (Jer 38:31-33 LXX; 31:31-33 ET) of a “new covenant” where the Law would be written on the hearts of God’s people. It was such a “new covenant”, one written on the heart, of which Paul was a “minister”. 40

Conclusion

2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6 forms a complex argument with a range of diverse images concentrated in a relatively short passage of writing. A number of these images, including the Roman triumphal procession, wafting aroma, letters of recommendation, tablets of stone and tablets of human hearts, have social, religious and literary backgrounds that are not immediately apparent to the twenty-first century reader. Such a reader, then, can become bogged down in attempting to determine the exact nuance of each image and lose sight of the overall picture.

One must keep in mind that Paul was writing against a background where his integrity and thus his message had been questioned. His travel plan changes

40 The Letter to the Hebrews (8:8; 9:15) also refers to Jeremiah’s prophecy of a “new covenant”. However, in Hebrews the “new covenant” is contrasted with the “first covenant” (πρώτη διαθήκη; 9:15), rather than the “old covenant” (παλαιὰ διαθήκη) as it is in 2 Cor 3:14.
(1:15-2:4), the difficulty of some of the things he had written (1:12-4; 2:1-4), his refusal to accept financial support (2:17; 12:13-16), his suffering of affliction (1:3-11), and his lack of letters of recommendation (3:1), all contributed to questions being raised regarding his authenticity as an apostle. Thus 2:14-3:6 forms the beginning of an extensive defence of his apostolic ministry.

Paul likened being a minister of Christ to being led as a captive in a Roman triumphal procession. This presupposes having previously been conquered, and brings to mind the fate of those in such a procession. It was usually, unless the one whose procession it was showed mercy, to be executed as a demonstration of the superior power and authority of the victor. Paul pictured himself as one being led to death for the sake of Christ.

Then Paul likened being a minister to the wafting aroma of sacrifice. It was as the apostle was such an aroma that the knowledge of God was spread abroad with eternal consequences. It was a perfume to those who were being saved, but an awful stench to those who were perishing.

Neither of these are images the Corinthians would have naturally associated with apostleship. Their criticisms of Paul suggest they would have used much more “noble” images. However, Paul used images of weakness – the image of being led as a captive and the image of being the aroma of a sacrifice – to illustrate his calling as an apostle. But even with such “weak” images, Paul claimed to be adequate for the task, a claim that raised the issue of self-recommendation and the basis for Paul’s claim to sufficiency.
In contrast to the apparent claims of some others, Paul’s sufficiency came not from himself, but from God. He was not the victor in the triumphal procession; he was the defeated captive. His presence in such a procession was not due to his own victory or achievement, but to the victory of God. It was from a position of weakness and defeat that he became the aroma of the knowledge of Christ.

Twice, in only slightly different terms (2:17; 3:4-6), he stated that he spoke, that he functioned as a minister of the new covenant, as one who was sent by God, whose responsibilities were carried out in the presence of God, and who laboured as he did because of his relationship to Christ. The Corinthians themselves were the evidence that this was the case.

Once again the contrast between human power and divine power is evident. And once again, congruence with the proposed interpretation of 2 Cor 12:9, “power is brought to an end in weakness” is demonstrated. The “defeat” presupposed by the inclusion in the triumphal procession, was the path to sufficiency for ministry of the new covenant. Thus, just as in 12:9, where Paul said he “will all the more gladly boast in my weaknesses so that the power of Christ will take up residence in me”, here (2:14) Paul thanked God for his being led as a captive. As it was Christ’s power taking up residence in him that enabled him to say, “Whenever I am weak, then I am strong” (12:10), here a similar sentiment is summed up in the statement “Not that we claim to be competent of ourselves. Rather, our competence comes from God” (3:5). This forms a concrete example of what sharing in Christ’s weakness but living “as a result of God’s power” (13:4) looked like in practical terms in Paul’s day-to-day functioning as an apostle, as a “minister of a new covenant” (3:6).
Chapter 7
Treasure in Clay Jars
2 Corinthians 4:1-18

Introduction

From Paul’s opening statement in 2 Corinthians 4, “Therefore, since we have this ministry as a result of receiving mercy, we do not lose heart,” it is apparent that the assertions of 2 Cor 4:1-18 are dependent on those in 2 Cor 2:14-3:18. This is supported by clear verbal links between 4:1-6 and each of the previous three subsections: 2:14-17, 3:1-6 and 3:7-18. The argument is then further developed in 4:7-16, which concludes with a repetition of the declaration from 4:1, “we do not lose heart”.

The statements of 4:1-18, and in particular 4:1-6, are made against the backdrop of defending the integrity of Paul’s ministry of making God known and contrasting that with the lack of integrity on the part of some others. This is demonstrated by the verbal links between 4:1-6 and 2:14-17.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>4:1-6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>δολούντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ</td>
<td>καπνλεύοντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ</td>
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<td>peddling the word of God, 2:17</td>
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<td>τῇ φανερώσει</td>
<td>φανερούντες</td>
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<td>open disclosure; 4:2</td>
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<td>ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ</td>
<td>κατέπνευσαν θεοῦ</td>
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<td>in the presence of God; 2:17</td>
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<td>to those who are perishing; 4:3</td>
<td>to those who are perishing, 2:15</td>
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<td>πρὸς φωτισμὸν</td>
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<td>to give the light; 4:6</td>
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<td>τῆς γνώσεως αὐτοῦ</td>
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<td>of the knowledge ... of God; 4:6</td>
<td>of the knowledge of him; 2:14</td>
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1 There is, however, good reason to see 2:14-17 and 3:1-6 as one sub-section rather than two.
These statements are also made against the backdrop of the commendation that
the existence of the Corinthian Church provides and the confidence that comes
from God with which Paul carries out the ministry he has been given. Again this
is supported by verbal links.

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<th>4:1-6</th>
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<tr>
<td>διακοινίαν</td>
<td>διακοινοθείασα</td>
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<td>ministry, service; 4:1</td>
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<td>οὐκ έγκακοίμεν</td>
<td>πεποίθησιν ... έχομεν</td>
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<td>we do not lose heart, we do not shrink back, we are not cowardly; 4:1, cf. 4:16</td>
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<tr>
<td>τῇ φανερώσει</td>
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<td>open disclosure; 4:2</td>
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<td>συνιστάνεις εαυτούς</td>
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<td>commending ourselves; 4:2</td>
<td>to commend ourselves, 3:1</td>
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<td>δούλους (ήμων)</td>
<td>διακόνους (κατ' ἑαυτής διαθήκης)</td>
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<td>[your] slaves; 4:5</td>
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<tr>
<td>εἴν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν</td>
<td>εἴν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν</td>
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<td>in our hearts; 4:6</td>
<td>in our hearts; 3:2</td>
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And more immediately, they are made against the backdrop of the contrast
between the old and new covenants and the veiling that comes with the old and
unveiling and glory that comes with the new as described in 3:7-18.

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Additionally, most commentators conclude that ἀλλά τοῦτο (4:1) looks back to the
previous chapter, and that τὴν διακονίαν ταύτην ("this ministry") is an
unmistakable reference to the preceding description of ministry of the “new
covenant”. Thus, in order to examine 2 Cor 4:1-18, it is necessary to keep in
mind the discussion of 2:14-3:6 and take into account 2 Cor 3:6-18, for which a
brief summary follows.

**The Two Covenants (2 Corinthians 3:6-18)**

2 Cor 3:6 forms a transition. Three key terms in the opening relative clause
provide links both to what has gone before and what will follow: (1) ἰκάνωσεν
(“who has made us competent”) picks up from the ἰκανός (“Who is competent for
these things?) of 2:16 and the ἰκανότης (“our competence is from God”) of 3:5;
(2) διακόνους (“competent to be ministers of the new covenant”) looks back to
dιακονήθηκα (“having been ministered by us”) in 3:3 and looks forward to the
four uses of διακονία in 3:7-9; and (3) ἰπαθής (“ministers of the new covenant”)
anticipates the comparison of the old and new covenants and their respective
ministries as described in 3:7-18 (Harris, 2005, pp 269-270).

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2 Exceptions to this include Martin (1986, p 76) who contends that ἀλλά τοῦτο (rendered
‘therefore,’ ‘for this reason’) may well look forward to what is to come in the next clause, since it
is not easy to connect 4:1 with the immediately antecedent section. The ground for Paul’s
assertion lies in the awareness he has of the mercy of God” (emphasis original). But he also
comments that “This ministry” (τὴν διακονίαν ταύτην) is that of the new covenant outlined in
chap. 3. … So it is just possible that there is a latent contact between 3:18 and 4:1; but it is latent.”
Similarly, Thrall (1994, p 298) comments, “The opening αλλά τοῦτο, ‘because of this’, refers
forwards, so that ‘this’ is explained as the possession of ‘this ministry’. At the same time, ‘this
ministry’ refers to what has gone before”. In both these cases, while grammatically ἀλλά τοῦτο is
regarded as looking forward, “this ministry” is still regarded as the new covenant ministry
expounded in the previous chapter. In contrast, Harris (2005, p 322) comments that ἀλλά τοῦτο is
retrospective in reference, unless it is followed by ἵνα (e.g., 1 Tim 1:16)."
While the opening phrase of 3:6 attributes the competence to be a minister of the new covenant to God, the latter part of the verse expands on this ministry; it is “not of letter, but of Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” Much time and effort has been expended on the question of what Paul meant by this letter/Spirit antithesis. The wide range of opinions demonstrates the difficulty of determining Paul’s intention precisely. It is not within the scope of this work to significantly add to this debate; however, some brief observations are in order. In whatever way the detail is to be understood, this contrast occurs within the larger picture of Paul’s defence of his apostolic ministry and so needs to be interpreted in that light. As part of his argument that because God has made him competent to be a minister of the new covenant his ministry was legitimate, Paul went on to contrast the ministry of the new covenant with that of the old covenant. This was a ministry that was more glorious than that of the old covenant.

3 The traditional view from early times was that this is a contrast between two ways of understanding the OT Scriptures: literally or metaphorically. Few hold to this view today. The dominant view since the Reformation has been to see it as a contrast between “Law” and “Gospel.” Thus, the “letter” (= attempting to gain salvation through the Law) kills, but the Spirit (= salvation through the gospel) gives life. The only benefit of the Law is that it shows how impossible it is for a person to gain salvation in this manner, because no one can keep it perfectly. In recent times a number have, particularly in the light of some of Paul’s other, more positive, comments regarding the Law, become uneasy with attributing such a negative role to the Law. Some have come to understand “letter” as a reference to the distorted, legalistic application of Law, so that it is not the Law, but legalism that kills. Others have limited Law to the parts of the Law that marked off the Jewish people as separate: food laws, circumcision, holy days etc., so that it is keeping the ritual without genuine faith that kills. The following are representative of recent attempts to explain this contrast. Provence (1982, pp 63-68) provides a summary of views and concludes that “the distinction probably refers to two different interpretations of the same law. One distorted its intention and emphasized external conformity without a corresponding internal change in desire. The other was consistent with the divine intention of the law because it assumed a change of heart and the enablement of the Spirit so that a person may conform himself to the true intention of the law” (1982, p 67). Hafemann (1995, pp 119-186) has an extensive treatment of this topic, but comes to a different conclusion to Provence. His conclusion is summarised in his commentary on 2 Corinthians (2000, pp 130-133) where he contends that against the background of Ezekiel and Jeremiah, “the ‘letter/Spirit’ contrast encapsulates [the] distinction between the role of the law within the Sinai covenant, in which it effects and pronounces judgement on Israel, and its new role within the new covenant in Christ, in which it is kept by the power of the Spirit” (2000, pp 132-133). In response to those who maintain that Paul is contrasting two dispensations or ministries, not two covenants, Harris (2005, p 280) argues that “such a distinction is difficult to sustain given the … antitheses [in 3:7-11], where one may justifiably equate ‘the old covenant’ with ‘the ministry/dispensation of death’ and ‘the ministry/dispensation of condemnation,’ and ‘the new covenant’ with ‘the ministry/dispensation of the Spirit’ and ‘the ministry/dispensation of righteousness’.”
Up to this point the principal OT passages underlying Paul’s argument had been Jeremiah and Ezekiel and the promise of a new covenant in which God’s Law would be written on people’s hearts, enabling them to obey it. At this point he moved to Exod 34:29-35, but probably with the larger context of Exodus 32-34 in mind. 2 Cor 3:7-18 logically divides into two sections: 3:7-11 and 3:12-18. The key word in 3:7-11 is “glory” (δόξα/δοξάζω), while the key word in 3:12-18 is “veil” (κάλυμμα). Both words are borrowed from the Exodus passage. The concepts of “boldness” or “openness” (παρθηρία) and “freedom” (ἐλευθερία) also have significant roles in 3:12-18.

As Paul had already made clear, a distinctive feature of this new covenant ministry was that it was characterised by the life-giving work of the Spirit in writing God’s Law on people’s hearts. But this was not to disparage the old covenant, for it had, indeed, come in glory. However, the new covenant came in even more glory. In 3:7-11, which functions as a commentary on Exod 34:29-30, Paul used the common rabbinic a minori ad maius technique of argument. He did so by using three parallel “if … how much more …” statements. If the old covenant, which was a ministry of “death” and “condemnation” and was “impermanent”, came in such glory that the people could not look at Moses’ face,

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4 2 Cor 3:7-11 not only picks up “glory” (δόξα/δοξάζω) from Exod 34:29-30, but “chiselled in letters on stone” (ἦν γράμματαν ἐντετυμμένη λίθῳ) picks up the image, if not the wording, of “the two tablets” (δύο πλάκες). Additionally “the people of Israel” (οἱ βασιλεία) is picked up from the following verses.

5 There is much debate as to how the verb καταργέω (3:7, 11, 13), particularly in the passive, should be translated. Options include: “being abolished”, “being nullified”, “being made inoperative”, “being made ineffective”, “ceasing”, “passing away”, “fading away”. In 3:7 it is applied to the glory on Moses’ face. The referent in 3:11 is less than explicit, but probably refers to the old covenant and/or its ministry. In 3:13 it is used to describe the “end” (τέλος) – and there is debate as to what that might signify – of the glory on Moses’ face. The following English translations of καταργέω in 3:7, 11, 13 respectively, illustrate the range both of translation and of implied meaning: KJV: “was to be done away with … that which was done away … that which is abolished”; NIV: “fading though it was … was fading away … was fading away”; NJB: “transitory
how much more will the new covenant, which is a ministry of “the Spirit” and of “being put right” and is “permanent”, be a ministry that comes not only in glory, but in fact, in even greater glory!

In 3:12-18 Paul continued his commentary on Exodus 34, this time with a particular focus on Exod 34:33-35. Again, this is a section which has been the subject of much debate and much difference of opinion regarding both its purpose and its meaning. And once again, a few brief comments, without significantly adding to the debate, will have to suffice.

Beginning 3:12 with “therefore” (οὖν), as well as including the phrase “such a hope” (τοιαύτην ἠλπίδα) created an obvious signal that this paragraph is dependent on the previous one. Because the new covenant was endowed with such glory, Paul acted with great “boldness” or “openness”. This was in contrast to Moses who had put a veil over his face. In 3:14-15 the veil imagery shifts from Moses’ face to the minds and hearts of the Jews in Paul’s own time. The “veil” which continued to be over their minds and hearts, was a symbol of their hard hearts. Only when a person turned to the Lord was the veil removed. The result was “freedom”, a parallel to the “boldness”/“openness” with which the paragraph opened.

… transitory … transitory”; NAB: “was going to fade … was going to fade … what was fading”;
REB: “was soon to fade … what was fading away … what was fading away”; NRSV: “now set aside … was set aside … was being set aside”; NLT: “was already fading … which has been set aside … fading away”; TNIV: “transitory … transitory … what was passing away” ESV: “was being brought to an end … was being brought to an end … was being brought to an end”.

While “veil” (καλώμα) is the obvious key word that 2 Cor 3:12-18 picks up from Exod 34:33-35, it also picks up words and phrases such as “the people of Israel” (οἱ υἱοὶ Ισραήλ); “to put on” (τείχευμι/περιτείχευμι), “take off” (περιτερέω), and “whenever anyone turns to the Lord” (ἡρίκα δὲ ἕαν ἐπιστρέψῃ πρὸς κύριον).
In 3:18 Paul summed up his argument and extended the images of “veiled” and “gazing” to all believers (ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντες, “we all”). Again, this is a complex verse with a variety of interpretations, yet it too can only be dealt with very briefly here. In contrast to the veil that Moses put over his face and the veil that remains over the minds and hearts of people when the old covenant is read, believers have “unveiled faces”. As a result they can behold the glory of the Lord. Not only are they able to see the glory, they participate in it and are transformed by it; they “are being transformed into the same image” (τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφοῦμεθα).

While there is no explicit antecedent for αὐτὴν, the parallel with “Christ who is the image of God” (τὸν Χριστὸν, ὁ δὲ εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ) in 4:4, suggests that it refers to being transformed into the image of God (cf. Rom 8:29; Col 3:10) rather than into the same image as each other. This transformation is an ongoing process (note the present passive of μεταμορφοῦμαι), one that occurs to an ever-increasing degree (“from glory to glory”, ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν). All of this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

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Contra Belleville (1991, pp 275-276; 1996, pp 110-111) who argues that given the context of 3:12-18, the “we … all” refers specifically to “all true gospel ministers without exception”, not believers generally. Most commentators, however, interpret it as a universalised reference to all believers.

There is debate as to whether the verb κατοπτρίζω should be translated “reflect as in a mirror” [(Translations: NEB, NJB, NIV, CEV, NLT; Commentators: Belleville (1991, pp 276-281; 1996, p 112), Van Unnik 1963, p 167)] or “behold as in a mirror” [(Translations: RSV, NAB, REB, NRSV, ESV, TNIV; Commentators: Barnett (pp 204-205), Bultmann (1985, p 90), Fee (pp 1994, 316-317), Furnish (1984, pp 213-214), Hafemann (1995, p 409), Harris (2005, p 214), Martin (1986, p 71), Savage (1996, p 146), Tasker (1958, p 68), Thrall (1994, pp 290-292), Windisch (1924, pp 127-128), Wright (1987, pp 144-145)). If it is “reflect as in a mirror” then it is the believer who reflects the glory of the Lord and the contrast is with Moses who veiled his face so that the glory was not seen. If it is “behold as in a mirror” then the believer sees the glory of the Lord (cf. 4:4) and the contrast is with the people of Israel whose minds/hearts were veiled so that they could not “see”. The linguistic evidence favours “beholding” and internally the contrast with unbelieving Israel whose understanding is veiled but whose veil is removed when they turn to the Lord, would seem to fit the context better.
This, then, is the ministry to which Paul referred when he claimed to “have this ministry as a result of receiving mercy”. It is a ministry, the goal of which is transformation into the image of God; a ministry with God as its source.

“**Therefore, since by God’s mercy…**” (2 Corinthians 4:1-6)

With the opening statement, “Therefore, since by God’s mercy we have this ministry” (4:1a), Paul reiterated the theme that runs throughout 2 Corinthians: ministry can only be done in God’s power, not in human power. As Hughes (1962, p 122) comments, “It is not an achievement of human ability but a consequence of divine mercy.”

It is not uncommon to view the aorist “having received mercy” (ἡλεήθημεν), along with the aorist “we have renounced” (ἀπείπαμεν) in 4:2, as an allusion to Paul’s conversion and/or call experience. Representative of this view is Harris (2005, p 323) who states that this “alludes to Paul’s conversion/call when he received mercy (ἐλεήθη) and was appointed to Christ’s service”. In contrast, Savage (1996, pp 152-153) states, “the term καθὸς ἡλεήθημεν refers not to Paul’s conversion or his call, but the mercy he receives amidst the rigours of ministry”. It is, perhaps not unreasonable to view it as a combination of both. So Garland (1999, p 204):

Paul refers to his calling when he says that “he has been mercied,” and such language shows that he regards his ministry as a gift from God, not some personal achievement. … The reference to mercy also reminds his readers how God has mercied him by delivering him from deadly persecution (1:10) and giving him the strength to carry on his ministry.
Many a person in ministry today will testify that looking back to their initial call experience has sustained them through difficult times. On the other hand, there are also many who will testify that an initial call experience can seem distant and questionable without the ongoing demonstration of God’s mercy in day-to-day situations. Both initial call and ongoing ministry are the result of God’s mercy.

As Harris (2005, p 323) goes on to comment:

Paul was profoundly aware that neither his appointment as an agent of the new covenant nor his adequacy to serve in this role arose from human initiative or resources. They were from first to last, ἐκ θεοῦ (cf. 2:17; 3:5) and διὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ (cf. 3:4), never ἐξ ἑαυτῶν (cf. 3:5).

Most standard translations render the final phrase of 4:1, οὐκ ἐγκακοῦμεν, as “we do not lose heart”. The etymology of the word gives a meaning of “conduct oneself badly” (Spicq, 1994, p 398), but it can be used in the sense of “be at fault”, “act negligently”, “be remiss”, or in the sense of “lose heart”, “give up”, “give in”, “weaken”, “become weary”, “turn back”, “be discouraged”. Most commentators understand Paul to be using the word in this second sense. The textual variant ἐκκακοῦμεν has the meaning “lose heart” (BDAG, 2000, p 303), and though it is weakly attested, it does indicate that at least some scribes understood Paul’s meaning here to be “we do not lose heart”. The parallel construction of 3:12 suggests that “we do not lose heart” is a corollary of “we act with great boldness” (πολλῆς παρρησίας χρώμεθα, 3:12) as well as of the “confidence”/“trust” (πεποίθησις, 3:4) Paul had through Christ. The repetition of οὐκ ἐγκακοῦμεν in 4:16, where it is juxtaposed with the “confidence” or “courage” (θαρρέω, 5:6, 8) demonstrated in “walking by faith” (διὰ πίστεως γὰρ

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9 Translations that have this include: RSV, NIV, NRSV, ESV, TNIV. The NEB and REB have “we never lose heart”. The NAB has “we are not discouraged” and the NJB has “we do not waver”.

10 “Therefore, having such hope…” (Ἐχόντες οὖν ταυτότην ἐλπίδα..., 3:12); “Therefore, having this ministry…” (Διὰ τούτο, ἐχόντες τὴν διακονίαν τεύτν..., 4:1).
περιπατοῖμεν, 5:7) in the face of the wasting away of the body (4:16), again suggests that “we do not lose heart” is an appropriate translation.

However, some commentators believe that the translation “lose heart” is not strong enough. Thrall (1994, pp 298-300) argues that it “weakens the apologetic force of Paul’s assertion”, and that the context suits a translation of “be remiss”, “be lax”, or “be reluctant”. Garland (1999, p 204) follows Thrall, arguing that this better fits the parallel with 3:12. He also cites Eph 3:12-13, where the verb is preceded by a reference to boldness and confidence (τὴν παρθένων καὶ προσωγγίων ἐν πεποιθήσει).

Whatever exact nuance was intended by the verb, Paul clearly used it as a reference to the possibility of not continuing in the ministry to which God had called him. The subsequent descriptions of Paul’s suffering (4:8-12; 6:4-5), as well as the opposition and criticism he was countering from some in Corinth, demonstrate that there was reason for Paul to “lose heart”, “give up”, or “be remiss”. This, however, was not an option, for “the ministry of the new covenant is of so glorious a character that such attitudes on Paul’s part would be unthinkable” (Thrall, 1994, p 299). In stark contrast to “losing heart”, “giving up”, “turning back”, “being remiss”, Paul had resolutely renounced shameful things, refused to adopt underhanded tactics and rejected anything that might falsify or distort God’s word (4:2a). Stated positively, he commended himself to the consciences of all, with an open statement of the truth and with God as witness (4:2b). Language parallel to 2:14-17 suggests that Paul was again contrasting
himself to, and answering the charges of some, who did use less than honest methods.

But even with such open and honest methods, it would seem that in some respect the gospel he proclaimed was veiled. There were many, including many of his own people, for whom the gospel remained obscure. But “even if” it was veiled, it was veiled to “those who are perishing”. Here Paul picked up his previous point (2:15-16; cf. 1 Cor 1:18) concerning the two possible responses to the proclamation of the gospel and the consequences of those responses. The fault was not with Paul’s method of proclamation, nor with the gospel itself. A response was required and that response could be one of acceptance or one of rejection.

The image of “veil” had previously been used as a symbol for the hard hearts of the Jewish people, both in the time of Moses and continuing into the present (3:14-16). “But whereas in that passage the veil lay over the hearts of the Jews when the writings of Moses were read, here the veil remains upon the minds of unbelievers (v.4) when the gospel of Paul is heard” (Harris, 2005, p 327).

The glory of the gospel was, in fact, the glory of the cross, which to those who were perishing, was no glory at all. Rather, in their estimation, it was stupidity and a scandal (1 Cor 1:23). The Messiah that Paul proclaimed was not the political deliverer of Jewish hopes. Instead he died on a tree, under the curse of God. To proclaim such a one as Messiah and Saviour was a scandal to Jewish ears. And it was no more attractive to Gentile ears. A man executed as a criminal
could not possibly be Saviour. What stupidity! “The Christian gospel offends those who want a more ‘tasteful’ salvation plan” (Garland, 1999, p 209). There is a veil over their hearts and minds. Savage (1996, p 143) describes this as the “veil of self-exaltation and pride”. God’s paradigm is so vastly different from that of self-centred humanity. Garland (1999, p 209) sums it up this way:

Those who look through the glass of a me-first culture can see no glory or power in giving one’s life for others. The gospel Paul proclaims does promise glory, but not through the acquisition of worldly power. It comes instead through unconditional surrender of one’s power to God.

The corollary of the divine paradigm of the cross was that God’s apostle would reflect the same paradigm. And a suffering apostle was no more acceptable than a suffering Messiah (Garland, 1999, p 209). That Paul suffered as an apostle, that his message was not always readily accepted, that he was not the eloquent speaker they would have liked, all added to the veiling of people’s minds and hearts. Implicit in Paul’s statement (4:3) is a warning to his readers not to place themselves in the category of those for whom the gospel is veiled and who are perishing.

In 4:4, Paul went on to give another reason for the “veil”: the “god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers” (εν οἷς ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰώνος τούτου ἔτυφλωσεν τὰ νοηματα τῶν ἀπίστων). 11 Most commentators today understand “the god of this age” as a reference to Satan. 12 Satan is referred to as a “god” because he is

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11 This translation sides with most commentators in regarding τῶν ἀπίστων as a reference to “unbelievers”, although a few (e.g. Collange, 1972, p 134; Martin, 1986, pp 78-79) regard it as a reference to Paul’s opponents in Corinthians.

the one who rules this current age. Clements (1996, pp 28-29) presents a different view. He argues that “the god of this age” should be understood as an appositional genitive. This “simply means that ‘the god of this age’ means ‘the god who consists of this age’. In other words, people make this age their god. And that is what renders them blind” (1996, p 28). He argues this on the basis of the appositional genitive in 4:6, “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” which is light that consists of the knowledge of the glory of God. This fits with Garland’s description of people who “look through the glass of a me-first culture” and Savage’s “veil of self-exaltation and pride”, though they both understand the phrase “the god of this age” as a reference to Satan. Clements’ view has some validity and is noted by Harris (2005, p 328) as a possibility. Harris, however, opts for an objective genitive: “the god who rules over this age” on the basis of other references to Satan as “ruler” (Eph 2:2; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

The difficulty with seeing “the god of this age” as a reference to “the god which consists of this age” is that it puts the emphasis on the choice of the individual to worship the things of this age instead of God, without necessarily acknowledging the presence of any spiritual influence by Satan. On the other hand, taking “the god of this age” as a reference to Satan can, if pushed too far, remove all personal responsibility – the proverbial “the devil made me do it!” But as Lambrecht (1999, p 64) notes, “Although the devil is the cause of the blindness, the addition at the end of “unbelievers” may contain a connotation of human culpability”. Harris (2005, p 329) takes this a step further with the observation that they are

\[\text{to this is Young and Ford (1987, p 115-117) who, along with many patristic interpreters, understand it as a reference to God.}\]

\[\text{Collange (1972, p 133) has a similar view.}\]
already “unbelievers” when Satan blinds them. They do not become “unbelievers” when Satan blinds them. Perhaps a both/and, rather than an either/or approach is preferable. People do have personal responsibility. By not believing, they place themselves among those who are “perishing”. At the same time, Satan is active in keeping them in a state of blindness. Their own attitude, as well as the influence of Satan, keeps them from recognising the glory of the gospel or of the apostle who proclaims it. As Savage sums it up:

Their self-regarding attitudes, inspired and sustained by Satan himself, would naturally lead them to look for the kind of glory which the world esteems but which is at odds with the cruciform glory manifested in their apostle.

The latter part of 4:4 can be understood to provide either the reason for, or the result of, the blinding. Either Satan blinds unbelievers so that they will not see the light of the gospel, or the result of Satan’s blinding of unbelievers is that they do not see. As purpose and result are closely related, it may not be necessary to make a clear distinction in this case. Whether it is the purpose or the result, or both, what unbelievers are kept from seeing is “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”.

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14 Furnish (1984, p 221) notes both possibilities without giving a preference for either. Lambrecht (1999, p 65) places the emphasis on result, but notes that the element of purpose may not be totally absent. Thrall (1994, p 308) discusses result without comment on purpose. Harris (2005, pp 329-330) discusses both possibilities, concluding that result probably predominates. Belleville (1996, p 116) states that “Eis to + infinitive denotes purpose rather than result.” And Barnett (1997, p 218) concludes that “given Satan’s negative purposes, it is probably a final or purpose construction”.

15 The NT hapax legomenon ἀναλάμπει can be used intransitively with the meaning “shine forth” or “dawn on” or transitively with the meaning “see (clearly)”. If it is used intransitively here, the subject is the light, with the resultant meaning “that the light … should not dawn on them”. The weakly supported textual variant with the addition of ἀνάθλος (“on them”) demonstrates that it has been understood this way. This understanding is also reflected in the NEB/REB “that the gospel … cannot dawn upon them and bring them light”. However, most contemporary translators and commentators understand it to be used transitively. Then the subject (unexpressed) is “them” and the meaning is “see”. This is reflected in the RSV/NRSV “to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel…” and the NIV/TNIV “so that they cannot see the light of the gospel…”. This fits better with the context where it is contrasted with Satan’s blinding, with the parallel in 3:13 where Moses
There are three genitives that qualify “light”. It is the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. The final genitive, “Christ” is acknowledged as “the image of God” (Barnett, 1997, p 218). The first genitive, τοῦ εὐαγγελίου (of the gospel), is a genitive of source or origin. It is the light “that comes from the gospel” (Harris, 2005, p 330; Barnett, 1997, p 218) or the gospel “from which the enlightenment comes forth” (Furnish, 1984, p 221, emphasis original). Where there is an accumulation of genitives, subsequent genitives are usually dependent on the previous one (Wallace, 1996, pp 75, 86), but the two subsequent genitives, τῆς δόξης (of the glory) and τοῦ Χριστοῦ (of Christ), can be understood in two ways: (1) “of glory” and “of Christ” are understood as parallel descriptions of “the gospel”, it is a “gospel of glory” or a “glorious gospel” as well as a “gospel of/about Christ”; or (2) “of Christ” is dependent on “of the glory” so that the content of “the gospel” is “the glory of Christ” (Furnish, 1984, p 222). Belleville (1996, p 116) opts for the first solution, arguing that “of the glory is most likely descriptive, ‘the light of the glorious gospel’”, with “of Christ plausibly construed as objective: ‘the glorious gospel about Christ’” (emphasis original).\(^\text{16}\) It is more common to advocate the second solution. Thus Harris (2005, p 330): “It is Christ’s own glory that is proclaimed in the gospel, and it is the gospel that creates illumination”. So also Thrall (1994, p 311): “The content of Paul’s gospel is the reflected glory of God made manifest in Christ”, and Lambrecht (1999, p 65): “the light comes from ‘the gospel’ (genitive of origin) and the gospel spreads ‘the glory of Christ’ (glory: objective genitive)”.

\[^{16}\] covered his face to keep the people from gazing, and the parallel with 3:18 if that is understood as “beholding in a mirror”, as seems likely.
With the final phrase, ὁ ἐστιν ἐικών τοῦ θεοῦ (“who is the image of God”), Paul identifies Christ as the “full and true representation of God”; not a mere copy (Witherington, 1995, p 386). As the image of God “Christ both shares and expresses God’s nature. He is the precise and visible representation of the invisible God” (Harris, 2005, p 331).

This verse forms a parallel with and contrast to 3:16-18. There, when someone turns to the Lord “the veil is removed” so that they can “see the glory of the Lord”, and are “transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another”, something that is brought about by the agency of the Spirit. Here the agent is Satan who blinds people’s minds so that they cannot “see the light of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”.

Paul continued with the strong statement, “We do not proclaim ourselves.” He may have wanted to refute any suggestion that “our gospel” (4:3) may indicate that he was the content of the proclamation, or that in commending himself to everyone’s conscience (4:2) he was exalting himself. On the contrary, the focus and content of the proclamation was “Jesus Christ as Lord”. He did, however, link the integrity of his ministry as an apostle to the integrity of the proclamation of the gospel as he went on to say, “and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake” (4:5).
The background for the phrase Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν κύριον, “Jesus Christ as Lord”,\textsuperscript{17} is the early Christological confession of “Jesus is Lord” (Κύριος Ἰησοῦς, 1 Cor 12:3; Rom 10:9; Phil 2:11). It flows on from Paul’s previous statements, for it is in Jesus as Lord that the glory of Christ as the image of God is revealed. Such a declaration is not in conflict with Paul’s previous assertions that he proclaimed “Christ crucified” (1 Cor 1:23; 2:2; Gal 3:1). While “Christ as Lord” does place the emphasis on Jesus as risen from the dead and exalted to a place of power and authority, exaltation only came by way of crucifixion. The life, death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus are a unity and are the core of the gospel proclamation.

With this declaration of the centrality of Jesus as Lord, Paul may have been alluding to, and implicitly criticising, those who “peddled the word of God” (2:17), who “proclaimed a different Jesus” (11:4), and made slaves of and preyed on the Christians in Corinth (11:20). In contrast, Paul proclaimed himself as their slave! This was not in the sense of them being his “boss” who could tell him what to do. Rather, as the moderating phrase “for Jesus’ sake” shows, it was in the sense of self-giving service. As he would later say, he would “gladly spend and be spent” for them (12:15). His service for them came out of his relationship to Jesus as Lord. It was because he was Christ’s slave (cf. Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Phil 1:1) that he became their “slave for Jesus’ sake”. As Harris (2005, p 333) sums it up:

\textsuperscript{17} As Harris (2005, pp 331-332) points out, “The word order (Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν κύριον, not κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν) and the parallel expression that follows (ἑαυτὸς … δούλοις, which can only mean ‘ourselves as slaves’) shows that κύριον is predicative, ‘Jesus Christ as Lord’.” And as Furnish (1984, p 223) notes, the emphasis “falls on Lord, which is the new element in comparison with the end of v. 4” (emphasis original).
He envisaged his relationship to Christ and his relationship to fellow Christians as one of slavery, that is, as unquestioning service for the benefit of the other, as the result of the unconditional but voluntary surrender of all personal rights. In this lowly service to others, Paul was following in the footsteps of his Lord, who himself had adopted the status and role of a slave (Phil. 2:7; cf. John 12:2-5).

2 Cor 4:6, then, gives the reason for, or basis on which, he functioned in this manner. It was because “it is the God who said, ‘Light will shine out of darkness’, who has shone in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Jesus Christ”, that Paul gave his life in service.

It is common to see in this statement an allusion to Paul’s conversion experience. There are certainly some parallels (Harris, 2005, p 336), and Paul was explaining the grounds for his ministry. However, there are also some significant differences; the reference to “our hearts” suggests a broader application than Paul alone, and in Acts it is a blinding light that shines around Paul rather than an illuminating light that shines in him (Belleville, 1996, p 118; Furnish, 1984, p 250). The image of light dispelling darkness would seem to be a clear reference to conversion, but whether it is a specific reference to Paul’s conversion is debateable. However, it is unlikely that Paul would speak of conversion without his thoughts being drawn back to his own experience, an experience that was foundational for his ministry.

With the phrase ἐκ σκότους φῶς λάμψει, (“light will shine out of darkness”), the majority of commentators see a reference to Gen 1:3-4. This would certainly be

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18 Included in this group are Barnett (1997, p 225), Garland (1999, pp 216-217), Hughes (1962, p 133), Kistemaker (1997, p 143), Plummer (1915, p 120), Thrall (1994, p 315), and Windisch (1924, p 139), though Garland and Thrall both acknowledge the possibility of Isa 1:9 being the
powerful imagery with the experience of internal illumination that comes with conversion being compared with the light that shone out of the darkness in creation. Others see Isaiah 9:1-2, a prophecy in which salvation is pictured in terms of light shining on those who live in darkness, as possibly the OT passage Paul had in mind.¹⁹ Both Hafemann (2000, p 179) and Harris (2005, p 334) see it as a combination of both; as an allusion to Gen 1:3-4 as it is modified by the prophecy of Isaiah 9:2.

The phrase πρὸς φωτισμόν τῆς γνώσεως τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ (“to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God”) again presents the reader with more than one possible interpretation. “Of the knowledge” (τῆς γνώσεως) could be understood as an appositional or an epexegetical genitive, such that “the light” consists of “the knowledge of the glory of God” (Barrett, 1973, p 127; Clements, 1996, p 28; Young and Ford, 1987, p 265; REB). The parallel with 4:4 “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (τὸν φωτισμὸν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τῆς δόξης τοῦ Χριστοῦ) suggests that it might be a subjective genitive or genitive of source, with “the knowledge” being a synonym for “the gospel” (Furnish, 1984, p 224; Harris, 2005, p 335). Alternatively, it could be an objective genitive indicating that the light reveals the knowledge (Zerwick, cited in Harris, 2005, p 336; CEV, NLT).²⁰

The following two genitives are a little more straightforward. This knowledge is “of the glory” (τῆς δόξης, objective genitive) “of God” (τοῦ θεοῦ, possessive referent. Furnish, (1984, p 251) goes as far as to say that “the Scriptural passage used here must be Gen 1:3, even though Paul has let his application of that text shape the way he quotes it”.¹⁹ Included in this group are Belleville (1996, p119), Clements (1996, p 30), Collange (1972, p 139) and Martin (1986, p 80). Savage (1996, pp 111-115) strongly argues for Isaiah being the background to Paul’s statement.²⁰ Frequently translations, including KJV, RSV/NRSV, NIV/NIrV, NAB, ESV, give a literal translation “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” and leave it up to the reader to decide the meaning.
genitive), which is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. “Face” (πρόσωπον) can sometime refer to “presence”, but here is better translated “face” as a reference to the incarnation and in contrast to Moses’ veiled face (Furnish, 1984, p 225; Harris, 2005, p 336).

There is a strong contrasting parallel between 4:4 and 4:6.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>4:4</th>
<th>4:6</th>
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<tr>
<td>ὁ θεὸς</td>
<td>ὁ θεὸς</td>
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<tr>
<td>the god</td>
<td>the God</td>
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<td>τοῦ αἰῶνος ταύτου</td>
<td>ὁ εἰπὼν· ἐκ σκότους φῶς λάμψει</td>
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<td>of this age</td>
<td>who said, “Light will shine out of darkness”</td>
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<td>ἔτοιμωσεν</td>
<td>ἔταξεν</td>
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<td>has blinded</td>
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<td>τὰ νοηματα τῶν ἀπίστων</td>
<td>ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν</td>
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<td>the minds of unbelievers</td>
<td>in our hearts</td>
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<tr>
<td>εἰς τὸ μή αὐγάσαι</td>
<td>πρὸς</td>
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<td>so that they cannot see</td>
<td>to give</td>
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<tr>
<td>τῶν φωτισμῶν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου</td>
<td>φωτισμῶν τῆς γνώσεως</td>
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<tr>
<td>the light of the gospel</td>
<td>the light of the knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>τῆς δόξης τοῦ Χριστοῦ</td>
<td>τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ</td>
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<tr>
<td>of the glory of Christ</td>
<td>of the glory of God</td>
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<tr>
<td>ὃς ἐστὶν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ</td>
<td>ἐν πρόσωπῳ [Ηρῴου] Χριστοῦ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>who is the image of God</td>
<td>in the face of [Jesus] Christ</td>
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The “god of this age” who brings blindness is contrasted with the God of creation, the God of eschatological promise, who brings light. “Knowledge” and “the gospel” are paralleled, as are “the glory of Christ” and “the glory of God”. The “image of God” is manifested “in the face of Christ”, forming a parallel with 3:18 where the “glory of the Lord” is seen and transforms people into that “same image”. It is this “glory” that was known in the gospel proclaimed by Paul.

Again Paul came back to the topic of his ministry of proclamation and the two possible responses to it that he had previously outlined in 2:17. Hafemann (2000, pp 181-182) summarises this section in this way:
Paul’s gospel declares the light of the new creation by showing forth how Christ himself manifests the glory of God’s image, that is, his righteous and merciful character (4:4). When in conjunction with this gospel God shines his presence into the lives of those whom he is now re-creating in Christ, he makes it clear how Christ himself embodies in his death and resurrection on behalf of those who were living in the darkness of sin the very glory of God (4:6). Because of the reality of this mercy both in Paul’s own life and in the lives of those to whom he is sent, Paul does not lose heart (4:1). Those who reject Paul do so because they remain blind to the reality of God in Christ. For the very glory of God himself is now being revealed through Paul’s ministry.

“Treasure in Clay Jars” (2 Corinthians 4:7)

Following immediately after the awe and wonder of the previous statement about “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”, this next statement must have come as shock to the Corinthians: “But we have this treasure in clay jars.” The image itself would not have been unfamiliar, but Paul’s application of it to the gospel and those who proclaim the gospel would have been new. And it would have flown in the face of what the newcomers to Corinth were saying, and what the Corinthian Christians were accepting concerning the necessity for the demeanour of the bearer of the message to correspond with the grandeur of the message. In their estimation, apostles of the glorious and powerful gospel should reflect that glory and power in their lives.

The Image

There have been numerous suggestions as to what the source of this image might have been, including: (a) the OT image of God being the potter and his servant the clay (Isa 64:8; Lam 4:2); (b) the OT image of God’s judgement as a breaking of pottery (Isa 30:14; Jer 19:11); (c) the rabbinic saying about the Torah held in
human hands being like wine that is kept in common pots rather than gold or silver; (d) the small clay lamps used for light in the ancient world; or (e) the Greek idea of the body as a container for the soul (Barrett, 1973, pp 137-138; Furnish, 1984, pp 253-254; Polhil, 1989, p 346; Wells, 1990, p 49). While Paul was almost certainly aware of at least some, if not all, of these, none quite fit the way he used the image. As Thrall (1994, p 324) concludes, he may have taken an already existing metaphorical use of the image and modified it for his own purpose. Alternatively, he may have created his own metaphor from the everyday practice of hiding coins in a common household container or of burying treasure in a clay jar.

However familiar or otherwise Paul’s audience may have been with various metaphorical uses of the image of a clay jar, they would have been very familiar with the properties of clay jars. They were the containers of common, everyday use – much like the plastic container of today. They were cheap, fragile and often unattractive; when they broke they were discarded. There is debate as to which of these characteristics Paul was highlighting in this contrast; in particular whether it was the characteristic of cheapness or fragility that he primarily focused on.

If Paul was focussing on the cheapness of the clay jar, then the contrast is between the enormous value of the treasure and the relative unimportance and perhaps unattractiveness of the messenger. However if he was focussing on the fragility of the clay jar, then the contrast is between the power of the treasure and the

21 Among those who see “cheapness” as the dominant contrast are Barrett (1973, pp 137-138) and Harris (2005, p 340).
weakness, fragility, even expendability of the messenger.\textsuperscript{22} It may not be necessary to decide between these two options.\textsuperscript{23} That the treasure is both valuable and powerful is undisputed. And it has already been made clear that the Corinthians understood Paul to be weak and unattractive. His weakness, lack of eloquence, ordinariness, fragility, suffering and hardships form a stark contrast with the unparalleled glory and power of the “treasure” he carries. Once again Paul gives a startling picture of what apostolic ministry is like. “Picturing himself as an ordinary, everyday utensil conveying an invaluable treasure is as striking an image as Paul’s picture of himself as a defeated but joyous prisoner marching in God’s triumphal procession (2:14)” (Garland, 1999, p 220).

**What is the “Treasure”?**

But what is this “treasure”? The τοῦτον (“this”) would seem to refer back to something in the immediate context. The nearest possible antecedent is “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (4:6),\textsuperscript{24} but this is a parallel with “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (4:4), which, in turn, links back to “our gospel” (4:3). Another possibility is that the use of ἔχωμεν (“we have”) in 4:7 indicates that the antecedent is “this ministry” (ἔχωντες τὴν διακονίαν ταύτην, “having this ministry”, 4:1).\textsuperscript{25} The fact that the whole context of 2:14-7:4 is Paul’s defence of his ministry supports this, as does the fact that hardship lists (4:8-9) frequently occur in the context of defence of ministry. As a result, the

\textsuperscript{22} Among those who see “fragility” as the dominant contrast are Allen (1998, p 287) and Polhill (1989, p 346).

\textsuperscript{23} Among those who see the contrast being a combination of both “cheapness” and “fragility” are Barnett (1997, p 230); Garland (1999, pp 220-221); Murphy-O’Connor (1991, pp 44-45); Savage (1996, p 166) and Watson (1993, p 43).

\textsuperscript{24} Proponents include Hughes (1962, p 135) and Plummer (1915, p 126).

\textsuperscript{25} Proponents include Bultmann (1976; ET 1985, p 112) and Savage (1996, p 164), although Savage does qualify his statement.
options are the “light” of the gospel, the “ministry” of the gospel, or the gospel itself. It is common to identify the treasure as “the gospel”, but as Harris (2005, p 339) points out, “Common to all these proposals is a reference to the gospel”, and similarly Furnish (1984, p 279) who concludes that the option chosen “makes little difference, finally, because these are all interconnected”. Perhaps Savage’s (196, p 164) suggestion of the combination, “the ministry of the gospel of the glory of God”, is a good one.

The Reason for having the Treasure in “Clay Jars”

The second part of 4:7 forms a purpose clause: ἵνα ἔπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ μὴ εὑρωντῆν (“so that the extraordinary power might be of God and not from us”). Most standard translations include the words “to show”, or something similar, as if Paul had written φανερώθη (“that it might be revealed/made manifest”, cf. 4:10, 11) or φανῇ (“that it might appear”, cf. Rom 7:13) or εὑρεθῇ (“that it might be found”, cf. 1 Cor 4:2). This results in a translation along the lines of “We have this treasure in clay jars to show that this extraordinary power is of God and not from us.” This type of translation gives the meaning that the power for ministry comes from God; the fact that the “treasure” – however that may have been defined – is contained in the clay jars of fragile, weak human lives, simply demonstrates that. A number of commentators follow

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26 Among those who identify the “treasure” as the “gospel” are Barrett (1973, p 138); Belleville (1996, p 120); Fee (1994, p 322); Kistemaker (1997, p 146); Tasker (1958, p 72) and Thrall (1994, p 322).

27 “To show”, RSV, NIV/TNIV, ESV; “to prove”, NEB/REB; “make clear”, NRSV/NLT.
this type of translation and give this as the meaning without any explanation of other possibilities.\(^{28}\)

Some who opt for this interpretation do give an explanation. For example Plummer (1915, p 127) argues that “may be” means “may be seen to be” as if φανη or ειρηθη had been used, citing γυνεσθω in Rom 3:4 and γενηται in Rom 7:13 as examples of similar usage. A few translations do render Rom 3:4 in this manner ("Let God be proved true", NRSV; cf. NASB, NET, ASV), but many others do not.\(^{29}\) However, it is much more difficult to find a translation for Rom 7:13 that renders γενηται in this manner,\(^{30}\) perhaps because earlier in the same verse φανη is used for “to be shown”. Plummer (1915, p 127) concludes that the meaning is, “May be perceived to belong to God and not to originate with ourselves.” Thrall (1994, p 324) cites Plummer and a series of English translations as support for “might prove to be”, as does Furnish (1984, p 254) who sees ἵνα … φανερωθη in 4:10, 11.

There is, however, an alternative translation and consequently an alternative interpretation. The “to show” is not in the Greek. It simply has “so that the extraordinary power might be of God, and not from us” – a present subjunctive (ῃ) of the verb ειμι (“to be”). Paul did not choose one of the alternative verbs listed above, and he could have done so as he did choose to use them elsewhere. If “to

\(^{28}\) Among those who opt for “to show that the extraordinary power comes from God” without explanation are Belleville (1996, p 120); Hughes (1962, p 137); Martin (1986, pp 85, 95); Watson (1993, p 43) and Witherrington (1995, p 387).

\(^{29}\) e.g. NIV/TNIV, ESV, RSV, NEB/REB, NAB, NJB, NLT, KJV/NKJV which have translations of “Let God be true” or “God will be true” or similar.

\(^{30}\) The NRSV has “in order that sin might be shown to be (φανη) sin, and through the commandment might become (γενηται) sinful beyond measure”. The ESV, NAB, NIV/TNIV, NEB/REB NASB, NET, RSV, ASV, KJV/NKJV all have something similar. The NJB’s “so it is by means of the commandment that sin shows its unbounded sinful power” is an exception.
show that” was the meaning he intended, he could have used φανερῶ, as he did twice in 4:10-11, or if he wanted literary variety he could have chosen to use either φαίνω or εὑρίσκω, but he did not. Therefore, we must consider the text in the form we have it, rather than in the form we think Paul meant. A more literal translation of the text as it stands is presented by the NJB which has “so that the immensity of the power is God’s and not our own” and the NAB, which reads, “that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us”.

While Harris (2005, pp 340-341) notes the possibility of the NJB rendering, he concludes, based on his understanding that ἵνα marks a divine purpose which includes the implication of the achievement of that purpose, that “the sense of ἵνα is ‘may be seen to be’”. If it was an aim that might or might not be fulfilled, he argues (2005, p 240) that then:

Paul could be suggesting that under different circumstances – if, for instance, the treasure had been lodged in a superior vessel – the transcendent power would proceed from a human source.

Thrall (1994, p 324) comes to a similar conclusion, arguing that logic indicates that:

The plain ‘might be’ cannot be what Paul intends. To say that his unimpressive life-style is such in order that it might be God’s power that makes his work effective would logically imply that, were his situation and personality different, he could prove effective on the basis of his own resources.

But suppose that is exactly what Paul meant! Savage (1996, p 166) asks the question:

Is it possible that Paul means exactly what he says, that it is only in weakness that the power may be of God, that his weakness in some sense actually serves as the grounds for divine power? (emphasis original)
If Paul is understood to mean exactly what he says, this opens up an alternative interpretation. It raises the possibility that ministry could be attempted with human effort, in human power. But the reason the treasure is in “clay jars” is so that this will not be the case. The weakness and fragility of the clay jar of a human life, is so that the minister will give up any illusion of self-sufficiency and realise that ministry can only be carried out in God’s power.

Such an understanding would fit with the situation in Corinth. There are indications that the congregation in Corinth was less than satisfied with the weak, sick, persecuted, afflicted and suffering Paul. They were much more impressed with those who aggressively demonstrated power (cf. 11:20), and who “peddled” God’s word (2:17). Paul had been defending his ministry as one for which he had boldness and competency and which came with glory, more glory even than the ministry of Moses. But, as Garland (1999, p 223) points out, in doing so “the danger is that one (and particularly the Corinthians) might be tempted to reverence the conveyor of this spiritual power rather than the divine source”.

Hafemann (2000, p 183) argues in a similar vein:

Since the emphasis in 3:1-18 was on the glory of God and the power of the Spirit, Paul now emphasizes that his mediation of the Spirit takes place in the ‘earthen vessel’ of his suffering. He does this so that the power and glory that he mediates might not be associated with his own person or talent in any way. Paul’s weakness ensures that the power is from God and not from Paul (cf. 12:1-10) (emphasis original).[^hafemann]

[^hafemann]: Hafemann, however, argues quite differently here than he did in his earlier work (1990a, pp 64-65) where he comments in response to Tannehill (1967, p 90) that the different emphasis of 1 Corinthians 4 and 2 Corinthians 12 should not be read into 2 Corinthians 4. Here Paul does not need to be reminded that he is weak because that is the problem, so Hafemann concludes that “the treasure is thus carried in a simple pot, in order that [emphasis original] the ‘extraordinary quality’ of the treasure, i.e., the ‘power,’ will in no way be confused with its container, but be recognized [emphasis added] for what it is: the power ‘of God’”. However, while the specific situation in 2 Corinthians 4 is somewhat different than in 2 Corinthians 12, it can be argued that the basic principle that Paul expounds is, in fact, the same. In 2 Corinthians 12 the “thorn in the flesh” is given to him to remind him of his dependence on God and to ensure that the power for ministry
The response of the Corinthian congregation to the newcomers’ claims to apostleship and the demonstrations of power that accompanied those claims, suggests that some had already fallen into the trap of focusing on “the conveyor of this spiritual power”. The necessity of Paul writing this letter reveals that the “false apostles” had had significant success. They demonstrated that, with a different situation and personality, there could be effective “ministry” on the basis of one’s own resources.

And one only has to look at what is done in the church today under the label of “ministry” to realise that much of it is done with human effort and has very little to do with God’s power. Our own experience and our definitions of what constitutes “effective ministry” suggest that we may have fallen into the same trap that at least some of the Corinthians had.

Additionally, this interpretation of 4:7 would fit with what Paul would later illustrate in 12:1-10. In 12:7-8 Paul would describe how he had been given a “thorn in the flesh” so that he “might not become proud” and how his request for the removal of this “thorn in the flesh” was denied. Just as in 12:9, his power was “brought to an end in weakness” through the suffering of the “thorn in the flesh” so that “the power of Christ might take up residence” in him, so too here, the “treasure” is placed in a “clay jar” so that the power might be from God and not originate with himself. Once again there is a reiteration of the principle that competency for ministry comes from God and not from a human source. But there is also a reminder that human ego and self-centeredness can result in an

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God’s, not his, while in 2 Corinthians 4 he expounds the principle that the “treasure” is in “clay jars” so that the power will be God’s, and not his own.
attempt to do ministry in one’s own strength. As Savage (1996, pp 168-169) concludes:

Paul became convinced that there were two mutually exclusive options available to people: the way of human arrogance and the way of divine power. ... If there is to be a demonstration of the surpassing power of God it will be in human self-negation. ... To the question, Why must the glory of God be revealed in human shame? the apostle answers, It is because only in shame can there be a demonstration of divine power (emphasis original).

It would seem that the recent memory of the near-death experience described in 1:8-9 continued to have an impact as Paul wrote this letter. The experience that taught him to “rely on God who raises the dead” also taught him that having the “treasure” in a “clay jar” was so that ministry would indeed be in the extraordinary power of the One who raises the dead. It is this ongoing experience of carrying “treasure” in a “clay jar” that is described theologically in 13:4 in terms of sharing both in the suffering of Christ and the resurrection power of God.

The Outworking of being a “Clay Jar” (2 Corinthians 4:8-18)

In Every Way Afflicted (2 Corinthians 4:8-9)

As Paul will do again in 12:9-10, here he immediately moves from a statement of ministry being in God’s power and not his own, to a statement about what he has suffered as an apostle. He does this with four balanced pairs of participles, each of which has an adversative relationship. Each consists of a passive participle followed by a negation and a second passive participle that intensifies the meaning of the first. The second participle does not simply indicate an escape from the situation, but an intervention on the part of God, and as such, forms a demonstration of the principle just articulated: hardship and suffering are both the
grounds for, and the evidence of, ministry being done in God’s power, not human effort. The antitheses can be set out as follows (Harris, 2005, p 342; Savage, 1996, p 169):

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<th>ἐν παντὶ</th>
<th>in every way/at all times</th>
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<tr>
<td>θλιβόμενοι</td>
<td>hard pressed/afflicted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἀποροίμενοι</td>
<td>perplexed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>διωκόμενοι</td>
<td>persecuted/pursued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>καταβαλλόμενοι</td>
<td>struck down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἀλλ’ οὐ στενοχωροίμενοι</td>
<td>but not crushed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἔξαποροίμενοι</td>
<td>but not thoroughly perplexed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐγκαταλειπόμενοι</td>
<td>but not forsaken/abandoned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἀπολλάμενοι</td>
<td>but not destroyed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ἐν παντὶ, whether it is interpreted temporally, “at all times” or locally, “in every way” (Harris, 2005, p 342) or as a combination of both, “at all times and in every way” (Barrett, 1973, p 138), most likely applies to each pair of participles. The negation is achieved with οὐ rather than the customary μὴ, probably to make the negative emphatic (Garland, 1999, p 228; Savage, 1996, p 171).

Grammatically, all the participles could be dependent on the ἔχομεν (we have) in 4:7, indicating attendant circumstances, but are generally understood as syntactically independent, functioning as if they were indicatives (Harris, 2005, p 342; Thrall, 1994, p 326).

In the first pair θλιβόμενοι ἀλλ’ οὐ στενοχωροίμενοι, “afflicted but not crushed”, the two participles have very similar meanings; however the context indicates that the second is more intense than the first (Barnett, 1997, p 233; Thrall, 1994, p 327). The intensification in the second pair, ἀποροίμενοι ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἔξαποροίμενοι, “perplexed but not thoroughly perplexed” (Kistemkaer, 1997, p 148), is much more clear. In the Greek there is an obvious play on words that is
difficult to express in English. The second participle is the same as the first except that the prepositional prefix ἐκ has been added. In the third and fourth pairs, the element of God’s rescue is more apparent. The first participle in the third pair διωκόμενοι, (persecuted/pursued) is used elsewhere (e.g. 1 Cor 4:12; Gal 1:13, 23; Phil 3:6) of Paul’s experience of persecution, both as a recipient and as an instigator. In contrast, the second participle in the pair ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἔγκαταλειπόμενοι, “but not forsaken” has a long history of association with God not abandoning his people (e.g. Gen 28:15; Deut 4:31; 31:8; Josh 1:5; Ezra 9:9; Ps 37:28). The final pair represent an extreme: Paul is καταβαλλόμενοι ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἀπολλύμενοι, “struck down but not destroyed”. This is the only time Paul uses the verb καταβάλλω which in non-biblical Greek can have the meaning “laid low” as with a weapon, “bullied”, “stricken” (Barnett, 1997, p 235), “thrown down” as in wrestling, “knocked down” as in boxing or “struck down” as in battle (Harris, 2005, p 344). Barnett (1997, p 234) contends that the second participle ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἀπολλύμενοι, “but not destroyed” has eschatological overtones as it is elsewhere used of eschatological destruction (2:15, 4:3; cf. 1 Cor 1:18). If understood this way, then from a human perspective Paul’s sufferings may look as if he has been “struck down”, but this is not, in final terms, destruction. The participle can, however, be understood as a synonym for “killed”; even though Paul is “struck down”, he is not actually killed. Implicit in each of these pairs is the view that God has been at work and the hardship has not run its full course: “the reference

32 Attempts to express the play on words include: “perplexed but not driven to despair” (NRSV), “bewildered, but never at our wits’ end” (REB), “stressed but not stressed out” (Garland, 1999, p 229), “at a loss but not absolutely at a loss” (Barnett, 1997, p 233), “near-desperate but not wholly desperate” or “at a loss but not totally at a loss” (Thrall, 1994; pp 320, 327).
33 The only other NT use of καταβάλλω is Heb 6:1 where it is used of laying a foundation.
34 REB has: “struck down but never killed”
to the power of God in v. 7 indicates that the mitigation of the hardship is God’s doing” (Thrall, 1994, p 329).

A catalogue of sufferings such as Paul included here was not unknown in the ancient world. It is possible that Paul was drawing on Cynic-Stoic diatribe, on apocalyptic Judaism or even on the OT concept of “the affliction of the righteous”, as a pattern, but there are significant differences between these and the function of hardship catalogues in Paul. Particularly striking is the difference between Paul’s use of hardship catalogues and that of Stoic writers. The Stoics appealed to hardships and adversity as proof of their superiority over such things. Troubles had no impact on them because of their own inner strength and self-sufficiency (Garland, 1999, pp 224-227; Savage, 1996, pp 169-172). For Paul, however, these lists function very differently. Rather than demonstrating his own inner strength, fortitude and self-sufficiency, they highlight his weakness. Unlike the Stoic sage, Paul never boasts in his own ability to endure; he never takes credit for the success he has had in proclaiming the good news of Jesus. His success is the result of God’s grace; his endurance is the result of God’s sustaining power. Both his confidence and his competence come solely from God.

Moreover, hardship lists such as the one in 4:8-9 are, for Paul, more than a literary device. They are the result of real suffering and hardship. The wording in 4:8-9 is very general; other lists (cf. 1:8-10; 6:4-10; 11:22-29; 12:10; 1 Cor 4:9-13) are more specific. In each case, whether specific events are mentioned or whether the references are more general, it would seem that Paul is referring to real

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35 Both Garland and Savage give examples from Epictetus, and Savage gives a detailed example from Plutarch.
experience, real hardships and afflictions that he had endured. As such, 4:8-9 becomes a concrete example of what it means to carry the “treasure” in a “clay jar”. This is in stark contrast to the views of those who have recently arrived in Corinth and are having a significant impact on the attitude of the Corinthian congregation toward Paul. As Allen (1998, p 287) summarises:

According to the super-apostles, brokenness ought to indicate the absence of God. ... They expect the Corinthians to regard suffering as a sign of Paul’s failure. Instead, the apostle reframes the super-apostles’ understanding of suffering.

Paul’s reframing of their understanding of suffering is based on the paradigm of the cross. It is only in the light of the stupidity of the crucifixion (1 Cor 1:18) that the weakness and affliction of Christ’s apostle can be correctly understood, for Paul’s ministry follows the same pattern (2 Cor 13:4).

**Carrying Jesus’ Death and Life (2 Corinthians 4:10-12)**

In these verses, Paul proceeded to give a theological explanation both for the suffering he had undergone (4:8-9) and for his statement that he carried “treasure” in a “clay jar” (4:7). In fact, the participle, “carrying about” (περιφέροντες) in 4:10, like the participles in 4:8-9, could be dependent on the εἰμι (we have) in 4:7. Nevertheless, most commentators regard 4:10 as an independent statement. The “always” (πάντοτε) with which the statement begins, parallels the ἐν πάντι of 4:8, but also parallels the ἀκεί (constantly) of 4:11. Additionally, there is a change in structure from 4:8-9, the adversative ἀλλά is discontinued; instead 4:10 structurally parallels 4:11 and 12, which are grammatically independent statements. Further, the participle (περιφέροντες) supports a purpose clause (ἵνα).
Paul’s sufferings and God’s deliverance expressed in the four antitheses of 4:8-9 are now expounded with three parallel statements employing the categories of “life” and “death”, and thus are related to Jesus’ suffering and death. The parallels between the statements are obvious, reminiscent of Semitic parallelism (Kistemaker, 1997, p 150). Nevertheless, there are some significant differences.

Both the similarities and differences become apparent in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4:10</th>
<th>4:11</th>
<th>4:12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>πάντοτε</td>
<td>αἰεὶ γὰρ</td>
<td>ὥστε</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>always</td>
<td>for constantly</td>
<td>so that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>τὴν νεκρωσίν τοῦ Τηροῦ</td>
<td>ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες</td>
<td>ὁ θάνατος</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the dying of Jesus</td>
<td>we who live</td>
<td>death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἐν τῷ σώματι</td>
<td>εἰς θάνατον</td>
<td>ἐν ἡμῖν</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the body</td>
<td>into death</td>
<td>in us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>περιφέροντες</td>
<td>παραδίδομεν</td>
<td>ἐνεργεῖται</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>carrying about</td>
<td>are being handed over</td>
<td>is at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>διὰ τοῦ θανόν</td>
<td>for Jesus’ sake</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>οὐκαὶ</td>
<td>οὐκαὶ</td>
<td>οὐ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>so that also</td>
<td>so that also</td>
<td>but</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἡ ζωή τοῦ Τηροῦ</td>
<td>ἡ ζωή τοῦ Τηροῦ</td>
<td>ἡ ἡ ζωή</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the life of Jesus</td>
<td>the life of Jesus</td>
<td>life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἐν τῷ σώματι ζωῆς</td>
<td>ἐν ὑμῖν</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in our body</td>
<td>in you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>φανερωθῇ</td>
<td>φανερωθῇ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>might be revealed</td>
<td>might be revealed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ἐν τῇ θνητῇ σαρκὶ ζωῆς</td>
<td>in our mortal flesh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Striking in 4:10 is the use of νεκρωσίς in relation to Jesus, in contrast to the use of θάνατος in relation to “us” in 4:11-12. The noun νεκρωσίς can refer to the process of “dying” or of “putting to death”, or to the state of “deadness” (BDAG, 2000, p 668b). While it is possible that Paul used νεκρωσίς rather than θάνατος simply for stylistic reasons, the rareness of the word suggests interpretive significance. Commentators are divided as to whether, in this case, the word

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36 The only other NT use of νεκρωσίς is at Rom 4:19 where it refers to the “deadness” of Sarah’s womb. Some mss (D, it syriac) read νεκρωσίς for πόρωσις (“hardening” of the heart) in Mark 3:5 (Harris, 2005, p 345).
should be understood as process or state, but the majority favour process.\textsuperscript{37} If it is understood as a process, then it could refer to the climactic series of events and the extreme suffering just prior to, and including, Jesus’ death (Savage, 1996, p 172); alternatively it could refer to the hardships Jesus underwent during his life as an itinerant preacher (Belleville, 1996, p 122). The frequent use in these verses of the simple name “Jesus” suggests Paul is thinking of Jesus’ physical life on earth. This could refer to the whole of his ministry or, in particular, to his suffering and death. Similarly, Paul’s sufferings as an apostle could correspond to either Jesus’ earthly ministry as a whole, or to just his suffering and death, but Paul’s use of the phrases “handed over to death” (εἰς θάνατον παραδίδομεν) – the same verb was used of Jesus being “handed over” to the authorities – and “death is at work” (ὁ θάνατος … ἐνεργεῖται) suggest the latter. As the immediately preceding verses show, Paul constantly faced hardship, suffering, and even experiences that brought him to the brink of physical death (cf. 1:8-9). It is these experiences that he described as the “carrying around” (περιφέροντες)\textsuperscript{38} of the dying of Jesus. The phrase suggests that Paul saw not only a similarity between his suffering and that of Jesus, but that his suffering was in some way participation in Jesus’ suffering (cf. 1:5; 13:4; Gal 6:17; Phil 3:10; Col 1:24).

Apostolic suffering and fragility are not just human pain caused by opposition and persecution. No, the dying of Jesus himself is present in it, visible in the body of the apostle (Lambrecht, 1986, p 136).


\textsuperscript{38} The only other uses of this word in the NT are at Mark 6:55 and Eph 4:14.
And this was not just an isolated incident; it was a way of life. It occurs “always”; the emphatic adverb πάντοτε (“always”, 4:10) is given additional weight by being placed first. The present tense of the participle περιφέρονται reinforces the idea of continuation, as does the use of ἀεὶ (“constantly”) at the beginning of 4:11. The same concept was reflected by the occurrence of ἐν πάντι introducing the antitheses of 4:8-9.

It is not a matter of occasionally suffering for a period of time and then being delivered and set free from suffering. Suffering is business as usual; but more than that, it is basic to his apostolic service (Garland, 1999, p 232).

But it is not only Jesus’ death that Paul participates in; he also participates in his life. The purpose (ἵνα καί) of Paul carrying around the dying of Jesus is that the life of Jesus (ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ) might be revealed (φανερωθῇ).

This remarkable fact is underscored by the telic ἵνα’s and emphatic καί’s in 2 Corinthians 4:10 and 11. He ‘carries about the dying of Jesus … in order that the life of Jesus also … might be manifested’. He ‘is … delivered over to death … in order that the life of Jesus also might be manifested’ (Savage, 1996, p 176, emphasis original).

Comparison with 4:7 where the “extraordinary power” is to be God’s, and 13:4 where Christ “was crucified as a result of weakness, but lives as a result of God’s power”, reveals that this “life” refers to Jesus’ resurrection life and is the result of God’s power. It may appear at first that Paul was alluding to his own future resurrection; however, this cannot be the case, as the “carrying around” of Jesus’ dying and the “revealing” of Jesus’ life were coincident. Both occurred in the day-to-day living out of Paul’s apostolic ministry. This is highlighted by an obvious difference between the first and second statements in this group of three. In the first clause of this second statement, the phrase ἵματι ὁ ζωντες (“we who live”), which parallels ἐν τῷ σώματι (“in the body”) in the first statement, is
placed before the reference to death instead of after it. So too, in the second clause, the phrase \( \text{en} \ \tau \eta \ \theta i m a t i \ \sigma a r k \ \dot{\iota} m \dot{\omega} \) ("in our mortal flesh"), which parallels \( \text{en} \ \tau \omega \ \sigma a m a t i \ \dot{\iota} m \dot{\omega} \) ("in our body") is placed after the verb \( \phi a v e r o \omega \delta \) ("might be revealed"). Thus, this second statement, apart from the initial "for constantly", begins and ends with a reference to physicality. Both Jesus’ death and life are exhibited in the present physical experience of the apostle. This is similar to Phil 3:10 where Paul affirmed that to know Christ was to know “the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings”. The phrases “the dying of Jesus” and “being handed over to death”, both of which take place in Paul’s physical body, give theological meaning to the being afflicted, perplexed, persecuted and struck down of 4:8-9. Likewise, the “life of Jesus” being “revealed” gives theological meaning to the “but not” components of the previous antitheses that displayed God’s deliverance. As Savage (1996, p 176) summarises:

We thus find in 2 Corinthians 4:10 and 11 a dramatic exposition of the principle enunciated in 2 Corinthians 4:7 and illustrated in verses 8 and 9. It is in human weakness that the superlative power of God springs into action, bringing ‘life’ out of ‘death’ and a new age from the old.

The third statement in this series of three initially appears to be a summarised version of the previous two. However, the second clause reveals a surprise. Instead of both death and life being revealed in the apostle, “death is at work in us, but life in you”. The “life” this time is revealed in the Corinthians. The “in us” (\( \dot{\iota} m \dot{\omega} \)) picks up the “in our body” (\( \text{en} \ \tau \omega \ \sigma a m a t i \ \dot{\iota} m \dot{\omega} \)) and “in our mortal flesh” (\( \text{en} \ \tau \eta \ \theta i m a t i \ \sigma a r k \ \dot{\iota} m \dot{\omega} \)) from the previous two statements, and possibly also the “clay jars” (\( \delta o t r a k \iota \nu o s \ \sigma k e \iota \delta o m \)) of 4:7. Once again, it is in the physical afflictions Paul suffers that “death” is revealed. But in contrast to the previous
statements, it is the Corinthians who are the recipients of “life”. A similar principle is stated in 1:3-7 where Paul’s affliction and suffering results in “comfort and salvation” for the Corinthians, and in 13:9 where Paul’s weakness results in their “strength”. More immediately, Paul would make a similar statement in 4:15 where he commented that “everything is for your sake”, which of course would ultimately be for “the glory of God”. As Harris (2005, pp 350-351) concludes:

He apparently saw not only a causal but also a proportional relation between his “death” and the “life” of the Corinthian believers. The deeper his experience of the trials and sufferings of the apostolic life, the richer their experience of the joys and privileges of Christian existence. … This rich theology of suffering was forged on the anvil of his own experience of “the sufferings of Christ.”

Glory (2 Corinthians 4:13-18)

What Paul has said so far in 2 Corinthians 4 may make the reader wonder about the validity of what he had said in 2 Corinthians 3. How could being a “clay jar” and “carrying around the dying of Jesus” possibly be compatible with the ministry of the new covenant, a covenant that Paul claimed had far more glory that even the covenant with Moses? In this final section of chapter 4, Paul came back to this topic of glory and the closely related topic of hope.

In 2 Cor 4:13 Paul explained why he continued to proclaim the gospel in the face of the suffering and hardship he had just spoken about.\(^{39}\) It was based on faith:

“we also believe and so we speak”. While there is debate about the nature of

\(^{39}\) While Paul does refocus his argument here, the ευκοψεῖς ἀρετή (“but having”) alerts the reader that what follows is linked to what went before. This verb (εὐκοψεῖς) is one Paul has already used several times, and will use again, to change the focus of his discussion, but at the same time advance the overall argument (cf. 3:3, “such is the confidence we have”; 3:12, “therefore, having such hope; 4:1, “therefore, having this ministry”; 4:7, “but we have this treasure; 5:1, “we have a building from God; 7:1, “since we have these promises”).
Paul’s use of the quotation from Ps 116:110 (Ps 115:1 LXX), it is clear from the following verse that this faith that issued in speaking was based on knowledge: the sure knowledge of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Flowing out of that was the hope of the resurrection of believers and their consequent entering into God’s presence. For the sake of the Corinthians – so that they would be among those who would be raised and enter into God’s presence – Paul was willing to undergo suffering. More than that, he was willing to undergo suffering so that God’s grace would extend to more and more people for the ultimate purpose of God’s glory. The underlying reason why Paul was willing to carry the treasure of the gospel in the “clay jar” of his difficult life, why he was willing to be “handed over to death for Jesus’ sake”, was that it would bring glory to God.

In 4:16 Paul came back to the statement with which he began the chapter: “So we do not lose heart”. The benefit to the Corinthians and the glory to God meant that Paul did not lose heart. As Kistemaker (1997, p 158) summarises:

[Paul] reflects on the pain and the afflictions he has endured already because of the gospel. He should have capitulated long ago. Instead Paul displays a resilience that he derives from God’s power (v. 7) residing within him and that he devotes to God’s glory (v. 15).

In the following verses (4:16b-18) Paul expanded on this and gave another, related reason: the suffering of the present does not compare with the glory of the future. The contrast is between the impermanent and the permanent. It was as he looked

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40 Interpretation revolves around the understanding of the phrase τὸ αὐτὸν πνεῦμα τῆς πίστεως (“the same spirit/Spirit of faith”). Options include: (1) The noun πνεῦμα is a reference to the Holy Spirit who engenders faith; it is the same (τὸ αὐτὸ) Spirit who inspired the Psalmist who enables Paul to proclaim the gospel. (2) The noun πνεῦμα is a reference to “disposition”, “attitude” or “spiritual state”. Paul could share this “same (τὸ αὐτὸ) spirit of faith” with the Corinthians, but more likely shares the “same spirit of faith” that is expressed by the Psalmist; faith that results in speaking. There are numerous variations on these options.

41 The grammar of 4:15 is awkward so the exact nuances of each phrase are obscure, but the general gist is clear. Furnish (1984, pp 259-261), Harris (2005, pp 355-357) and Thrall (1994, pp 344-347) all offer possible explanations.
forward to the permanence of future glory, that he was able to endure the impermanence of present hardship. He would further expand on this in 2 Corinthians 5, where his confident hope of being “at home with the Lord” (5:8), supported by the “Spirit as a guarantee” (5:5), as well as the knowledge of the inevitability of giving an account of his actions (5:10), compels him to make it his aim to please the Lord (5:9) and to “try to persuade others” (5:11). Hope and glory cannot be separated from suffering, for it is only as the “treasure” is carried in a “clay jar” that the “extraordinary power” is from God; that his carrying the “dying of Jesus” truly results in “life” both for himself and for those to whom he ministers.

Conclusion

As was the case with 2:14-3:18, Paul wrote in a very intense manner in this section. In many ways he reiterated and expanded on what he had already stated in that section. He was competent for ministry, but that competence came from God (3:16; 3:6); he carried treasure in the clay jar of his fragile, battered human existence so that ministry might be in God’s power (4:7). He suffered as one led to death in a Roman triumphal procession (2:14), but in doing so made known the “aroma” and “fragrance” of the knowledge of God (2:14-15) with eternal

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42 Again there is debate about the exact nuances of this paragraph, particularly to do with how to interpret “inner person” and “outer person”. Most commentators agree that Paul is not presenting the type of dualism common in Greek thought, but some do consider that he is using Greek categories. However, even among those who agree it is not Greek dualism as such, there is debate how the categories are used. Some options include: (1) a contrast between what is visible to people and what is invisible to people but visible to God; (2) a contrast between the physical which is deteriorating and the inner spiritual life; (3) a similar contrast to the “old self” and “new self” (cf. Rom 6:6; Col 3:9-10; Eph 4:22-24); (4) a process identical with the gradual transformation into glory mentioned in 3:18, something that will be completed at the resurrection. The last two are the most common, with a combination of these two also being common.
consequences for those he encountered (2:15-16); he carried around the “dying of Jesus” (4:10) and was “always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake” (4:11) so that “the life of Christ might also be made visible” in his life (4:10-11), and that “life” might be at work in those to whom he ministered (4:12). He was a minister of the glorious new covenant, one that brought life through the Spirit (3:6-7) and so he spoke with confidence (3:4), boldness (3:12), and “freedom” (3:18), based on hope (3:12); because of the hope of the glory to come (4:17), Paul did not “lose heart” (4:1, 16), but as a result of faith (4:13) and God’s mercy (4:1) he spoke out (4:13) with an open statement of the truth (4:2), so that more and more people would come to believe with the ultimate end of glory to God (4:15). There is clearly an internal coherence in this extended defence of his apostolic ministry (2:14-7:4); the same principles underlie his whole defence. But there is also continuity with the defence of Paul’s apostolic ministry presented in 2 Corinthians 10-13.

In both the traditional interpretation and in the alternative interpretation presented in this work, 4:7 and 12:9 are complementary. If 12:9 is translated in the traditional way, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”, this affirms the same basic principle that is presented by the traditional translation of 4:7, “we have this treasure clay jars to show that the extraordinary power is of God, and not from us”. In the weakness of the “thorn in the flesh”, as in the weakness of being a “clay jay”, God’s power is demonstrated. The alternative translations and interpretations present an even stronger statement. That the “treasure” is in “clay jars” so the “the extraordinary power might be of God and not originate with us” parallels “My grace is sufficient for you; for power
is brought to an end in weakness”, that is, Paul’s power, human power, is brought to an end in the weakness of the “thorn in the flesh”. The purpose is to exclude pride and to allow the indwelling of Christ’s power. The weakness of the “thorn in the flesh”, like the weakness of the “clay jar”, means that the illusion of self-sufficiency is surrendered. Rather than ministry being attempted with human effort, it truly becomes the “result of God’s power” (13:4) and in reliance on “God who raises the dead” (1:9).

Similarly, the theological underpinning presented in 4:10-12 complements the theological underpinning presented in 13:3-4. Paul’s paradigm for ministry was based on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Just as Jesus was “crucified as a result of weakness” but “lives as a result of God’s power”, so too, both the weakness of suffering and the power of God were present in Paul’s ministry for the benefit of others (13:4). It was as Paul identified with and shared in Jesus’ suffering and death, that life was available to others (4:12). The Corinthians were comfortable with “God’s power” being displayed in Paul’s ministry, but not so comfortable with the suffering. They viewed the suffering as a negation of God’s power, quite the opposite of the way Paul viewed it. Just as Jesus’ resurrection life would not have been possible without the crucifixion, so too for an apostle of Jesus Christ, there could be no sharing in the resurrection life without a sharing in the suffering. Suffering that resulted in dependence on God was an integral part of ministry that made life available to others.
Introduction

In 2 Corinthians 6:3-4 Paul makes the statement: “We put no cause for offence in anyone’s way, so that there might be no fault found with our ministry. But as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way…” In this section Paul once again returned to the topic of the legitimacy of his ministry. He did this by describing what apostolic ministry had meant for him: a ministry that had entailed suffering. Just as the existence of the Corinthian church (cf. 3:2-3) was proof of his legitimacy, so too were the hardships he had undergone for the sake of the gospel. But the way he exercised his ministry, through suffering and hardship, was dependent on the nature of the ministry to which he had been called.

Therefore, prior to examining Paul’s description of the realities of his ministry in 2 Corinthians 6, it is necessary to overview the nature of that ministry as it is described in 2 Corinthians 5. Paul began (5:1-10) by addressing the topic of his motivation, which was based on his hope for the future and his aim to please the Lord. He then continued (5:11-15) to address this topic, this time with reference to how it impacted others. Having addressed the matter of motivation, he then addressed the matter of the content of his message (5:16-6:2): he had a ministry of reconciliation. The nature of the content of the ministry of reconciliation gave rise to the character of Paul’s implementation of that ministry (6:3-10), implementation characterised by “great endurance” (6:4). Finally, based on the
character of his ministry, Paul proceeded to call for a response from the Corinthians (6:11-7:4).  

The Nature of the Ministry (2 Corinthians 5:1-6:2)

Future Hope (2 Corinthians 5:1-10)

In 1 Cor 5:1-10 Paul elaborated on the future hope that had already been depicted in the previous verses. As has been noted before, it is a characteristic of Paul’s writing that he often moved from one thought to another without clear distinctions as he built towards a defence of his apostolic ministry. The same is true here. That both the death and life of Jesus were exhibited in his own life (4:10-12), led him to discuss the certainty of the future based on the resurrection of Jesus (4:14), and to reaffirm that what he did was for the benefit of others (4:15; cf. 4:12) and for the glory of God (4:15). In turn, this led to the reaffirmation: “So we do not lose heart” (4:16; cf. 4:1). Present temporary affliction (cf. 4:8-9) did not compare with future eternal glory (4:16-18). Paul then went on to expand on this future glory, this future hope, this confidence in the face of possible physical death (5:1-10).

Thematically 5:1-10 follows straight on from 4:16-18, but has an internal structural coherence. The conjunction γάρ (“for”) at the beginning of 5:1 provides

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1 It is not within the scope of this work to discuss the issues regarding the integrity of 6:13-7:1, nor to discuss its significance. However, if 6:13-7:1 is regarded as integral to 2 Corinthians, then it forms part of Paul’s call for a response. If it is regarded as an interpolation, then the call for a response can be viewed as being confined to 6:11-13 and 7:2-4. It is also possible to view 7:5-16 as part of this call for a response. Similarly, if chapters 8 and 9 are viewed as having a unity with chapters 1-7, they can also be understood as a request for a response to Paul’s defence of his apostolic ministry.
a clear connection with what has gone before while the ὥστε (“therefore”) of 5:11 connects it with what follows. Internally, the conjunctions introducing each verse give a tight line of reasoning within the section. This has led to differences of opinion on the matter of whether to take 5:1-10 as a subsection on its own, or to see the subsection as 4:16-5:10. Most see 5:11 as beginning a new subsection, but in addition to the “therefore”, the association of the “judgment seat of Christ” (5:10) with “the fear of the Lord” (5:11) once again provides a transition between two closely related topics.

While the general gist of this section is clear, it is difficult to discern the exact nuances of a number of phrases and metaphors resulting in a variety of interpretations. It is not within the scope of this work to do detailed exegesis of this section. A brief overview in order to set the scene for what follows will have to suffice.

It is highly probable that the “wasting away” (4:16), the being “afflicted in every way” (4:8-9), and surely the “affliction” in which he “despaired even of life” (1:8) caused Paul to consider more closely the distinct possibility that he might die prior to the Parousia. “Knowing” and “being confident” are key words which are balanced by the key words “groaning” and “longing”. In the face of

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2 γάρ (“for”, 5:1), καὶ γάρ (“for also”, “and so”, 5:2), εἰ γε καὶ (“assuming, that is”, “if indeed”, 5:3), καὶ γάρ (“for indeed”, “for it is a fact that”, 5:4), δὲ (“now”, 5:5), ὥστε (“therefore”, 5:6), γάρ (“for”, v. 7), δὲ (“I repeat”, “so then”, 5:8), διὸ καὶ (“that is why”, “and so”, 5:9), γάρ (“for”, 5:10), which leads to ὥστε (“therefore”, 5:11)

3 “We know” (οἴδαμεν, 5:1), “knowing” (εἰδότας, 5:6); cf., “knowing” (εἰδότας, 5:11), “we know/regard no one … we once knew … we no longer know” (οἴδαμεν οἴδαμεν … εἰ καὶ ἐγνώκαμεν … οὐκέτι γινώσκομεν, 5:16).

4 “Being confident” (θαρροῦμεν, 5:6), “we are confident” (θαρροῦμεν, 5:8).

5 “We groan” (στενάζομεν, 5:2, 4).

6 “Longing for” (ἐπιθυμοῦμεν, 5:2)
suffering and death, Paul had confidence and hope. He was confident that “if the earthly tent we now live in is destroyed”, that is, if he should die, God would provide “a house not made with hands” (5:1). The eternal dwelling – or expressed another way, the eternal “clothing” (5:2-4) – would be so much better and more permanent than the current one. Present existence involved “groaning” and “longing” for the future (5:2) when “what is mortal is swallowed up by life” (5:4). The assurance of such a future was the indwelling Spirit whom God had already given (5:5).

Such confidence and hope for the future caused a dilemma for Paul: being “at home in the body” meant being “away from the Lord” (5:6) and also necessitated walking “by faith and not by sight” (5:7). His preference was to be “away from the body and at home with the Lord” (5:8). The certainty of the future, the sure hope that one day he would be “at home with the Lord” and that he would “appear before the judgement seat of Christ” (5:10) and give account of what he had done, meant that his aim in the present was “to please him” (5:9).

**Persuading Others (1 Corinthians 5:11-15)**

As Paul introduced what it meant in practical terms to “please him” (5:9), he picked up the notion of appearing before the “judgement seat of Christ” and expressed it as “knowing the fear of the Lord” (5:11). Thus there was a dual motivation for ministry. Positively, the prospect of being “at home with the Lord” motivated him to “please him” in the present. Negatively, “knowing the fear of the Lord”, that is, knowing the certainty of having to give account for one’s
actions, motivated Paul to “try to persuade others” (5:11a). And his motives were transparent, both to God and to the Corinthians (5:11b).

Once again Paul returned to the question of self-commendation. The transparency of his motives did not constitute self-commendation. Rather it constituted an opportunity for the Corinthians to have an answer for those who gave priority to outward appearance. The content of his message, his manner of delivering that message, and his motivation for ministry, provided what was needed to counter those who emphasised status, power and eloquent rhetoric. While verse 13 is notoriously difficult to interpret, it does show that Paul’s motivation was a combination of “for God” and “for you”. It was “the love of Christ”\(^7\) (5:14a), that is, Christ’s love demonstrated in his having “died for all”\(^8\) (5:15a) that urged Paul to continue. It was because he was convinced both of the truth of the gospel message that he proclaimed, and of the need for people to respond to it (5:15-16), that he engaged in ministry even in the face of hardship, suffering and opposition. These verses also encapsulate a summary of what it is that Paul endeavoured to persuade people to accept, in essence a summary of the gospel message: people should respond to Christ’s having died “for all”, with the result of living “no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them” (5:15b).

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\(^7\) Most commentators interpret this as a subjective genitive.

\(^8\) It is not within the scope of this work to enter the debate as to the significance of ὑπὲρ πάντων ... ὁ ἡμῶν ... ὑπὲρ πάντων ... ὁ ζώντων (5:12b-15a). The question is whether (a) all four expressions refer to all people; (b) all four expression refer to believers only; or (c) one or more expressions refer to all people, while the rest of the expressions refer to believers only. Barnett (1997, pp 228-293), Harris (2005, pp 422-424) and Thrall (1994, pp 410-412) all address the issues involved.
Ministry of Reconciliation (1 Corinthians 5:16-6:2)

The summary in 5:14-15 of what Paul tried to persuade people to accept, provides a transition to Paul’s explanation of his ministry as one of reconciliation. Because all things had become new “in Christ” Paul no longer viewed Christ from a human perspective as he once had (5:16-17). This drastic change in Paul’s approach to life was the result of what God had done: “all this is from God” (5:18). Again the basic principle of Christian life and ministry as the result of God’s power is reiterated. The change in Paul’s life was the direct result of God’s power; it was none of his own doing.

While the “all this” (τὰ πάντα, 5:18a) that comes from God, looks back to the new approach to life, indeed the new life itself, recorded in 5:16-17, it also introduces the next series of statements. Paul expanded on this statement with three additional phrases which fill out what “all this is from God” meant for him.

Firstly, “through Christ God reconciled us to himself”; (τοῦ καταλλάξαντος ἡμᾶς ἐαυτῷ διὰ Χριστοῦ, 5:18a); secondly, God “gave us a ministry of reconciliation” (δόντος ἡμῖν τὴν διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς, 5:18b); and thirdly, “in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” (θεὸς ἦν ἐν Χριστῷ κόσμου καταλλάσσον ἐαυτῷ, 5:19a). Paul, and indeed all believers, have been reconciled to God.

Having been reconciled to God, Paul had then been given a “ministry of reconciliation” (τὴν διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς). The basis of this ministry was that God was active in reconciling the world to himself.

Commentators are divided in how they understand the ἡμᾶς. In the immediate context it could refer to (a) just Paul; (b) Paul, as well as his co-workers and/or the Corinthians; (c) all believers. However, the statement is true of all believers, whether that is specifically what Paul intended to say or not.
Reconciliation (καταλλάσσω/καταλλαγή)\(^{10}\) refers to the transformation of a hostile relationship with God to a friendly relationship with God. It is God who initiates this transformation, while it is Christ who is the agent through whom it is achieved. God is also the goal of such reconciliation; people are reconciled to God, not the other way around. Human beings are, however, the recipients of this reconciliation providing they are willing to accept it. This would seem to be another way of describing being “put right with God”, that is, the initial positive response to the gospel message and consequent change in relationship to God.

Paul’s ministry was primarily to convince people to do just that; to accept the gospel message and to come into a right relationship with God.\(^{11}\) He used a number of different phrases to describe the task that God had given him: God “has given us a ministry of reconciliation” (5:18), “entrusting us with the message of reconciliation” (5:19), so “we are ambassadors for Christ” (5:20) and “God is making his appeal through us” (5:20), therefore “on behalf of Christ” Paul urged people to “Be reconciled to God” (5:20).\(^{12}\) This appeal is made in his role as an

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\(^{10}\) The verb (καταλλάσσω) is used three times and the noun (καταλλαγή) twice in 5:18-20.

\(^{11}\) A number of different verbs are used in this passage to describe Paul’s part in proclaiming this message: “persuade” (πει,κω, 5:11); “appeal”/“urge” (παρακαλέω, 5:20; 6:1); “beg”/“implore” (δε,ομι, 5:20).

\(^{12}\) Most translations (including KJV, RSV, NEB, NIV, NJB, NASB, CEY, NRSV, NKJV, NET, ESV, TNIV) as well as many commentators including Barnett (1997, p 311), Furnish (1983, pp 338-339), Garland (1999, pp 298-300), Kistemaker (1997, pp 198-200), Lambrecht (1999, p 100), Martin (1986, p 155) and Witherington (1995, p 396), either add “you” to their translation or interpret the verse as if ὑμῖν was included: “We entreat you, ‘Be reconciled to God’”. Furnish (1983, p 338) does not include “you” in his translation, but argues (1983, p 339) that “one may justifiably supply you after the verb, even though ὑμᾶς does not stand in the Greek, because an exhortation to the readers is being introduced” (emphasis original). This interprets the statement as an appeal to the Corinthians, who had previously been reconciled to God when they first accepted the gospel, to be reconciled to God again. But there is no ὑμῖν, “you” in any Greek manuscript. If the verse is translated without the “you”, then the statement becomes a generalised statement about Paul’s ministry: it consists of appealing to people to be reconciled to God. This fits better with the immediately preceding statements regarding reconciliation which appear to be discussing “reconciliation” as a synonym for initial acceptance of the gospel message. Commentators who translate/interpret the verse without the “you” include Harris (2005, pp 425, 447), Hughes (1962, p 211), Moore (2003, pp 146-155) and Thrall (1994, p 438). Hughes makes the strong comment: “At this point the Apostle is concerned with the ministry of reconciliation for the world at large rather than with its application to the special circumstances of the church in Corinth. He is referring, not to the requirements of believers, but to the evangelistic duty of Christ’s ambassadors.
ambassador for Christ, on behalf of and in place of Christ; the authority behind the appeal is Christ’s not Paul’s.

Paul, in 5:21 as in 5:15, concluded the paragraph with a summary statement that encapsulates the core of the gospel. Christ “being made to be sin” (5:21) parallels Christ “dying for all” (5:15). The result of becoming the “righteousness of God” (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ, 5:21), parallels living for the one “who died and was raised” (5:15). The phrase δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ, the “righteousness of God” has been the subject of much debate, particularly with regard to what type of genitive it might be, and thus what the phrase might refer to: the righteous character of God, the righteousness that God gives to people when they believe, the forensic right standing that God imparts to people because of what Jesus has done, a right relationship with God through faith, are some of the suggested possibilities. It is not the purpose of this work to significantly add to this debate; nevertheless, a few comments are, perhaps, in order. There are a number of parallels throughout this passage. These parallels are set out in the following table:

to go into all the world and announce the good news of reconciliation to every creature, pleading with men to receive as their own what God has freely provided in His Son. His specific appeal to the Corinthian believers comes shortly, in the first verse of chapter 6, but not here.” Similarly, Moore, who provides a detailed discussion of the history and issues relating to the translation of this verse, argues that Paul uses καταλλάσσειν (“to reconcile”) and καταλλαγή (“reconciliation”) to refer both to God’s action and human response in a person coming to faith in Christ. He concludes: “In writing to the congregation at Corinth Paul was writing to a group of people who had already made a Christian commitment. … Consequently, it would make no sense for Paul to urge his Corinthian converts to be reconciled to God. Nor does he, if we listen to him in his own Greek medium (5.20b)” (2003, p 154).
While there is no clear consensus on what Paul may have meant by Christ being “made to be sin for our sake”, it is clearly coordinate with “died for all”, and it is through this event that God acted for the reconciliation of the world to himself.

The benefit to human beings is described in a number of ways: they are a new creation, they are to live for Christ, they are reconciled to God, and they become the “righteousness of God”. Given the emphasis in this passage on reconciliation, a strongly relational term, and the parallel between “reconciliation” and the “righteousness of God”, it seems reasonable to understand δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ, at least in this passage, as relational, that is, a reference to being in a right relationship with God.  

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13 Most translations simply have “the righteousness of God” and leave it up to the reader to decide what that might mean. Note, however, the NLT: "so that we could be made right with God". In his discussion of this verse, Moore (1996, pp 707-715) argues that: “Here γίνεσθαι seems to make better sense when understood as the equivalent of εἶναι, the δικαιοσύνη as ‘rightness’ or ‘right relationship’, and the genitive of θεοῦ as a genitive of respect or a genitive of relationship” (1996, p 714, emphasis original). He concludes that because this “appears to be the earliest instance of Paul’s use of the δικαιοσύνη-θεοῦ combination” and because it “occurs in a context dominated by the notion of ‘reconciliation’ between God and humankind”, 2 Cor 5:21 “provides the interpretive key to his use of this combination elsewhere” (1996, pp 713, 715).
Up to this point Paul seems to have been talking generally about his ministry, a ministry of urging people to be reconciled to God. In 6:1-2, he turned specifically to the situation of the Corinthians. They had responded, they had “been reconciled”, but he urged them to demonstrate that this acceptance of God’s grace had not been in vain. Their attitude to him and the way he conducted his ministry suggested that they may have been in danger of this very thing. Paul quoted the LXX of Isa 49:8 to support his plea that God’s grace not be ineffective in their lives. They were living in a time of opportunity; they had experienced God listening to them and had experienced the grace of salvation. Thus the statements here constitute an exhortation to keep going and not to turn aside; such exhortation was also part of Paul’s ministry. With this application to the Corinthian congregation, 2 Cor 6:1-2 forms a bridge between Paul’s description of the content of his ministry and message (5:1-21) and his description of his manner of carrying out that ministry (6:3-10).

The Reality of Apostolic Ministry (2 Corinthians 6:3-10)

Having discussed the content of the message he proclaimed and the ministry he had been given, Paul went on to address the manner in which he carried out that ministry. He described (6:3-10) the way in which he “worked together” (συνεργεῖον) with God in urging people not to accept God’s grace in vain (6:1).

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14 BDAG (2000, p 969a) gives the meaning of the compound verb συνεργεῖον as: “to engage in cooperative endeavour, work together with, assist, help”. Most commentators understand the verb to imply working with God, supplying θεῷ in their translation, although that is not explicitly stated in the text. However, a number understand it as working together with the Corinthians, supplying ὑμῖν in their translation, though that is not explicit either. The context would seem to favour “with God”. 
The section (6:3-10), forms one of four “hardship catalogues” in 2 Corinthians.\textsuperscript{15}

The “hardship catalogue” or “peristasis catalogue” was an established genre.

Examples can be found in both Greek and Latin literature, as well as in the Hebrew Bible and later Jewish literature (Fitzgerald, 1997, pp 275-280).

However, Fitzgerald (1988, p 116) argues that it is “the figure of the ideal sage and his sufferings that provides the backdrop for the analysis of Paul’s Corinthian catalogues”.

Since peristases constitute a test of human character, they have both a revelatory and a demonstrative function. The man with little or no integrity collapses under the weight of his burdens. His peristases reveal and prove his deficiencies as a person. … For the sapiens, however, … his serene endurance of the greatest possible calamities is the definitive proof of his virtue and serves to distinguish him from every charlatan who merely claims to be “wise” (Fitzgerald, 1988, pp 114-115).

For Paul, endurance of hardship was not proof of his own virtue or self-sufficiency, rather it was proof of his authenticity as an apostle chosen by God and approved by God. It was through God’s power, not his own resources, that he was able to endure.

This passage is a highly structured and “rhetorically powerful sequence” (Barnett, 1997, p 321), which has an “elevated” (Thall, 1994, p 454) and “sophisticated” (Harris, 2005, p 464) style.\textsuperscript{16} It makes use of such literary devices as repetition,

\textsuperscript{15} The other “hardship catalogues” in 2 Corinthians are located at 4:8-9; 11:23b-29; and 12:10. In 2 Cor 1:8-10 and 12:32-33 Paul described specific examples of affliction, but neither account forms a “hardship catalogue” as such. There is an additional “hardship catalogue” in 1 Cor 4:10-13. This is the highest concentration of such lists in the Pauline corpus.

\textsuperscript{16} With such a complex structure, there has been some suggestion that Paul may have been using a pre-existent text, either his own or perhaps one borrowed from another source and modified. For example, Martín (1986, p 161) follows Collange (1972, pp 281-301) in arguing for structure and unusual vocabulary being an indication of the use of a source, but with the possibility of Paul reworking the source. He summarises, “In short, Paul has probably taken a text of stoic nature.” In contrast, Thrall (1994, p 454) states, “The suggestion that, because of its elaborate construction, the passage must have been previously formulated prior to its incorporation in the present letter surely begs the question of Paul’s manner of composition. He may well have taken more care over his style than the suggestion allows.” Whether Paul was using a source or was composing for this
assonance, alliteration and chiasmi. The sequence not only includes “hardships” and adverse circumstances, but also includes positive elements, particularly character qualities and means by which Paul carries out his ministry. The structure can be set out as follows:

- An introduction (6:3-4a), which includes the heading characteristic, “in great endurance” (ἐν ὑπομονῇ πολλῇ, 6:4b).

- A list of nine hardships (6:4c-5) that describe the circumstances of Paul’s ministry. Each is introduced by ἐν + dative, and each is in the plural. These can be sub-divided into three groups of three.

- A list of eight virtues, character qualities, and positive means by which Paul carries out his ministry (6:6-7a). The group can be sub-divided into two groups with the first four each being comprised of a single word preceded by ἐν, and the second four each being comprised of a two word phrase preceded by ἐν. Unlike the previous group, these are all in the singular.

- Three phrases introduced by διὰ + genitive (6:7b-8a). Again the group can be subdivided. The first phrase is longer than the following two and describes the instruments or means of Paul’s ministry. The second and third phrases each consist of an antithesis that constitutes circumstances in which his ministry is conducted.

- Seven antitheses which describe the paradoxical nature of apostolic ministry (6:8b-10). The first part of each antithesis is introduced by ὥς, but there is variation in the use of conjunctions introducing the second part of the antithesis. The first four and the last one use καί, while the fifth and sixth use occasion, interpretation can only be based on the text as we have it. If he was using some other source, he has made it his own.
δέ. Several also include additional words, forming phrases that progressively become slightly longer.

Introduction to the Realities of Ministry (2 Corinthians 6:3-4b)

In spite of the seemingly abrupt shift and the grammatical awkwardness,¹⁷ there is a thematic connection to what had previously been written. The “ministry” (ἡ διακονία) that Paul did not want to be brought into disrepute was the “ministry of reconciliation” (τὴν διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς, 5:18), “the ministry of the Spirit” (ἡ διακονία τοῦ πνεύματος, 3:8), the “ministry of righteousness” (ἡ διακονία τῆς δικαιοσύνης, 3:9). It was for the sake of this ministry that he endeavoured not to cause anyone any offence (6:3). And it was as a “minister of God” (ὁ θεοῦ διάκονοι, 6:4a), a parallel to a “minister of the new covenant” (διακόνους καινῆς διαθήκης, 3:6) and “an ambassador on behalf of Christ” (ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ οὖν πρεσβεύωμεν, 5:20), that he commended himself “through great endurance” (ἐν ὑπομονῇ πολλῇ, 6:4b). The idea that is expressed positively in 5:12, “giving you an opportunity to boast about us” (ἀφορμῆν διδόμεν τε ἵματι καιρήματος ὑπὲρ ἤμων), is expressed negatively using the same verb διδοῖμι, in 6:3, “in no way giving anyone cause for offence” (μηδεμίαν ἐν μηδενὶ διδόμεν τε προσκοπήν).¹⁸

The alliteration and double negative of the opening phrase μηδεμίαν ἐν μηδενί (6:3) give emphasis to Paul’s statement. In no way did he want his behaviour to

¹⁷ Grammatically, the participles διδόμενες (6:3) and συνιστάντες (6:4) could be understood as dependent on παρακαλῶμεν (6:1). However given Paul’s frequent use of participles for finite verbs (cf. 4:8-9 which is also in the context of a hardship catalogue), it is probably best to understand these as if they were finite verbs.

¹⁸ The μηδενί can be understood as either neuter or masculine, giving rise to a variety of translations. Additionally the double negative (μηδεμίαν ἐν μηδενί) is difficult to express in English without seeming awkward; most translations opt to use just one negative.
bring the gospel into disrepute or to cause offence in such a way as to prevent people from accepting the gospel. This negative is balanced by the positive \( \epsilon\nu \ \pi\alpha\nu\tau\iota \) in the following verse. In everything he did he endeavoured to commend himself as a minister of God. His way of doing this was “through great endurance” (\( \epsilon\nu \ \upsilon\sigma\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\upsilon \ \pi\omicron\alpha\lambda\lambda, \ 6:4b \)). This phrase acts as a sort of heading;\(^{19}\) what follows explains what acting with “great endurance” looked like in the day-to-day living of Paul’s apostolic ministry.

**Nine Hardships in Ministry (2 Corinthians 6:4c-5)**

The nine plurals in this section can be understood as generalising, but more likely reflect multiple experiences of each hardship in Paul’s life. The first triad, “in affliction, in distress, in calamities” (\( \epsilon\nu \ \theta\lambda\lambda\psi\epsilon\omicron\omicron, \ \epsilon\nu \ \alpha\nu\acute{\alpha}\gamma\kappa\alpha\iota\varsigma, \ \epsilon\nu \ \sigma\tau\epsilon\nu\sigma\chi\omicron\omega\rho\iota\alpha\varsigma\varsigma, \ 6:4c \)) is composed of broad terms that can refer to a wide range of circumstances including both external and internal pressures. Paul probably used the three terms as synonyms, thus adding emphasis. The noun \( \theta\lambda\lambda\psi\iota\varsigma \) “affliction”, is a key word in 2 Corinthians, occurring nine times,\(^{20}\) with the cognate verb \( \theta\lambda\lambda\beta\omicron \) opening the catalogue in 4:8-9.\(^{21}\) The cognate verb of the second term (\( \sigma\tau\epsilon\nu\sigma\chi\omicron\omega\rho\epsilon\omicron\omega \)) also appears in 4:8, and both the second and third terms are repeated in the list in 12:10. This repetition of terms in subsequent catalogues adds emphasis and the repetition of a term with the addition of new terms indicates that the subsequent catalogue is an expansion of the first. “Paul clearly does this in the present case, so that the catalogue of 2 Cor 6 both assumes and supplements the catalogue of 2 Cor 4” (Fitzgerald, 1988, p 192, emphasis original).

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\(^{19}\) It is the only phrase in 6:4b-6 that is singular and that is qualified, and it refers to a character trait, a way of dealing with hardship, rather than being a hardship or an affliction.

\(^{20}\) In 1:4[2x], 8; 2:4; 4:17; 6:4; 7:4; 8:2, 13. It also occurs in 1 Cor 7:28.

\(^{21}\) As well as occurring in 1:6 and 7:5.
The second triad, “in beatings, in imprisonments, in riots” (ἐν πληγαῖς, ἐν φυλακαῖς, ἐν ἀκαταστασίαις, 6:5a) contains terms that are more specific and illustrate the hardships listed in the first triad. Each refers to external circumstances that were imposed by others. The first two are punishments, while the third is a situation that could easily lead to such punishments. In contrast, the third triad “in hard work, in sleeplessness, in hunger” (ἐν κόποις, ἐν ἀγρυπνίαις, ἐν νηστείαις, 6:5b), refer to “occupational hazards”, that is, hardships that Paul voluntarily accepted as part of his ministry.

**Eight Positive Means for Ministry (2 Corinthians 6:6-7a)**

There is a shift in emphasis at this point, moving from hardships that were endured to character qualities that enabled Paul to endure. There are eight listed here, and if the opening heading “in great endurance” is included in the list, then there are nine character qualities that balance the nine hardships. The series of hardships are placed between the first and second character qualities, “endurance” and “purity”.

This frame gives the catalogue a qualitative character, so that it demonstrates that Paul has done more than simply endure his toils and afflictions. It shows that he has endured with purity, out of knowledge, with patience and kindness. There is thus a character and an integrity to Paul’s endurance that distinguishes it from a mere withstanding (Fitzgerald, 1988, p 194).

The eight occurrences of ἐν in this group are instrumental. They are grouped in two tetrads that characterise the means by which, and the manner in which, Paul carried out his ministry.
The content of the first tetrad, “in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness” (ἐν ἁγνότητι, ἐν γνώσει, ἐν μακροθυμίᾳ, ἐν χρηστότητι, 6:6a) may reflect the accusations that had been levelled against Paul. “In purity” (ἐν ἁγνότητι) could be translated “in sincerity”, and there had been questions raised about Paul’s sincerity. There had been criticisms regarding his change of travel plans and the apparent inconsistency between what he wrote in his letters and what he said and did in person (1:12-13; 1:23-2:4; 10:9-11). And while Paul was willing to accept the accusation that he was “untrained in speech” (10:6), he was not willing to accept that assessment with regard to knowledge. Paul’s “knowledge”, which must surely be his knowledge of God and of the gospel that was his ministry to proclaim, had been made evident to them. Their very existence was testimony to Paul’s effectiveness in communicating that knowledge (3:2; 11:6). “Patience” and “kindness” reflect what Paul would later say about appealing to them “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ”; and that, too, was not to the Corinthians’ liking. The forceful approach of the newcomers seemed to have greater appeal (11:19-21).

The first and last phrases in the second tetrad form an inclusio: “in the Holy Spirit” (ἐν πνεῦμα ἁγίῳ) and “in God’s power” (ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ). Just why Paul would mention the Holy Spirit in a list of character traits has been the topic of debate. Most commentators conclude that Paul may have been thinking of the

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22 Some understand this as a reference to the human spirit. While most translations have “the Holy Spirit”, the NRSV, for example, has “holiness of spirit”, which makes this phrase a reference to another character trait. The argument is that there are examples where πνεῦμα refers to the human spirit (e.g. 1 Cor 2:11; 7:34; 2 Cor 7:1, 13), and that understanding suits this context as part of a list of character traits. However, nowhere else does the exact phrase πνεῦμα ἁγίῳ refer to the human spirit, while there are a number of examples where it does refer to the Holy Spirit (e.g.; 1 Cor 12:3; Rom 5:5; 9:1; 14:17; 15:13; Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 1:5, 6; 4:8; 2 Tim 1:14; Tit 3:5; cf. 1 Cor 6:9; 2 Cor 13:13; Rom 1:4; Eph 1:13). Additionally, the subsequent reference to “God’s power” supports πνεῦμα ἁγίῳ being understood as a reference to the Holy Spirit.
“gifts of the Holy Spirit” (cf. Gal 3:5; 1 Cor 12:8; 14:12, 32) or possibly “fruit” of the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22-23 where μακροθυμία, χρηστότης and ἐγκράτεια all appear). That he meant something like “in the power or enabling of the Spirit” is also a possibility. The ambiguous reference suggests that Paul may have had some combination of these ideas in mind.²³ Thrall (1994, p 460) makes the following statement:

Paul would see the Spirit as fostering the virtues he lists, and the virtues themselves as evidence of the Spirit’s inward operation, and his own ministry which he defends is the διακονία τοῦ πνεύματος (3:8).

Between the phrases “in the Holy Spirit” and “in God’s power” appear the two phrases “in non-hypocritical love” (ἐν ἀγάπῃ ἀνυποκρίτῳ) and “in truthful speech” or “in the message of truth” (ἐν λόγῳ ἀληθείας), indicating what it is that Paul does “in the Holy Spirit” and “in God’s power”.

The term ὑποκριτής referred to an actor who played a part on the stage; it later came to have the metaphorical sense of “pretender” or “dissembler”. With the negative prefix the adjective had the metaphorical meaning of “without hypocrisy”, “free from pretence” (Harris, 2005, p 475). Thus most translations have “sincere” or “genuine”, which gives the meaning but loses the negative prefix. This is the sort of love that should characterise relationships between all believers (Rom 12:9; 1 Pet 1:22), and Paul maintains that it does characterise his relationship with the Corinthians. It is a relationship that is genuine, that is authentic, and in which there is no pretence.

The phrase ἐν λόγῳ ἀληθείας could be translated “truthful speech” and be understood as referring to Paul’s integrity in what he says; he always tells the truth, keeps his promises, and so on. It could also be understood as a reference to the gospel message, the “word/message of truth” that Paul proclaims. While it is common for translations to have “truthful speech”, commentators are more likely to understand it as a reference to the gospel. In both Eph 1:13 and Col 1:5, the phrase is equated with the gospel; a similar interpretation is implied in 2 Tim 2:15.

The arrangement of phrases in this tetrad suggests that it is “in the Holy Spirit” and “in God’s power” that Paul both interacts in a genuine, authentic, non-hypocritical way with the Corinthians, and proclaims the gospel, the message of truth. As Barnett (1997, p 330) sums up:

His life bears the stamp of the message of the death and resurrection of Christ that he proclaims, thus undergirding his claims to apostolic authority and moral authority.

Once again the paradigm of ministry being in God’s power comes to the fore. Fitzgerald (1988, p 195) argues that with the mention of the “power of God”, Paul makes “a conscious cross-reference to the catalogue of 4:7-12”. He maintains that “by referring to the divine power in 6:6 he is reminding his readers of those previous assertions and their continuing foundational validity for what he asserts here” (Fitzgerald, 1988, p 195). Similarly Thrall (1994, p 461), states that “this is a clear allusion to one of the dominant themes of the letter, i.e., the effectiveness

24 Translations that have “truthful speech” include RSV, NAB, NIV, NRSV, ESV, TNIV.
25 Translations that have “word of truth” include KJV, NJB, NKJV; NEB/REB has “grasp of truth”. Commentators who understand it in this manner include: Barnett (1997, p 329), Furnish (1984, pp 345, 356), Harris (2005, p 476) and Thrall (1994, p 460).
of divine power in situations of human weakness”. Functioning “in the Holy Spirit” and “in the power of God” restates in different terms what Paul had already asserted in this letter: that he had the “treasure in clay jars so that the extraordinary power will be of God and not originate with us” (4:7), that he was not “competent to claim anything as originating with us; our competency is from God”, and that he had learned to rely on “God who raises the dead” (1:9). It is also congruent with what he would later say about modelling the pattern of Christ who was “crucified as a result of weakness, but lives as a result of God’s power” (13:4), and what he had already said in a previous letter: “My message and my proclamation were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not be in human wisdom, but in God’s power” (1 Cor 2:4-5). In both 2 Cor 6:6b-7a and 1 Cor 2:4-5, the Spirit, divine power and proclamation of the gospel message are brought together.

This is in stark contrast to those who “peddle God’s word” (2:17), who “falsify God’s word” (4:2), and who proclaim “another Jesus … a different spirit … a different gospel” (11:4). Additionally, in the context of a “hardship catalogue”:

This utter dependence on God’s power in all aspects of his life and ministry forms a stark contrast to the self-sufficiency and vigorous independence of the ideal Stoic sage who in his own person was “unconquered and unconquerable” (Harris, 2005, p 476).

Paul’s attitude was very different from both the Stoic sage and the newcomers to Corinth. His was not one of self-sufficiency or self-reliance. Rather, it was one of dependency, dependency on God. And it was through the various afflictions and weaknesses that he suffered that he came to be aware of his lack of self-sufficiency, his need for dependency, and thus learned to rely on God.
Three Instruments or Circumstances in Ministry (2 Corinthians 6:7b-8a)

Structurally, due to the introduction of each phrase with διά + genitive, the next three phrases have a unity. However the first one is distinctly different from the second two. The first phrase is twice the length of the second two, both of which have a διά ... και structure.

The first phrase describes the instrument or means by which Paul functions:

“through the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left” (διὰ τῶν ὀπλῶν τῆς δικαιοσύνης τῶν δεξιῶν καὶ ἀριστερῶν). As is so often the case, the way in which the genitive should be understood is debated. There are a number of possibilities, but one of the following two options is most common. It could be understood as a genitive of content, that is, “weapons consisting of righteousness” with “righteousness” referring to moral righteousness (cf. Rom 6:13).26 This fits with the fact that Paul is in the process of defending his integrity as an apostle. Alternatively, it could be understood as a subjective genitive, “weapons supplied by righteousness”, with “righteousness” as a reference to God’s righteousness, or as a metonym for God (cf. Eph 6:11, 13).27 This view detects a parallel with the previous phrase “in God’s power” and understands this statement as yet another reaffirmation of the principle that ministry is in God’s power, not human power.

There is also debate about the significance of the mention of both the left and right hand. The military image leads some to perceive this as a reference to both offensive (right hand) and defensive (left hand) weapons, perhaps even a reference to a sword and a shield. It may however, simply be a reference to the

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26 Both Barnett (1997, p 330) and Thrall (1994, pp 461-462) understand it as genitive of content.
27 Both Garland (1999, p 310) and Harris (2005, pp 477-478) understand it as subjective genitive.
comprehensiveness or completeness of the weapons, or to preparedness for attack from any direction.

The second and third phrases introduced by \( \delta \iota \alpha \) and separated by \( \kappa \alpha \iota \), “through honour and shame; through evil report and good report” (\( \delta \iota \alpha \ \delta \dot{o} \zeta \iota \ k\alpha \iota \ \dot{a} \tau \mu \iota \alpha \zeta \), \( \delta \iota \alpha \ \dot{\upsilon} \sigma \phi \tau \mu \iota \alpha \zeta \ k\alpha \iota \ \epsilon \upsilon \phi \mu \iota \alpha \zeta \)), have a chiastic structure. The first and last characteristics are positive, with the central two being negative. The two phrases are very similar in meaning, but perhaps the second pair is focused more on verbal response than the first pair. This repetition emphasises the antitheses. This use of \( \delta \iota \alpha \) can denote attendant circumstances or divergent attitudes to Paul’s ministry. Whether the circumstances are positive or negative, whether people’s responses are positive or negative, Paul continues to display “great endurance” (6:4; cf. Phil 4:11-12) in carrying out the “ministry of reconciliation” (5:18).

**Seven Antitheses of Ministry (2 Corinthians 6:8b-10)**

What follows is a further seven antitheses, but with a different grammatical construction. These antitheses can be understood in several different ways. It is possible to understand them as a further reference to Paul’s reputation, making them an expansion of the previous two antitheses. This works with the first few antitheses, but the latter ones do not fit this pattern so readily. It is also possible to understand them as a contrast between the first item, which refers to external appearance, and the second item, which refers to the internal reality. But the second item in several of the antitheses is subject to external verification. It is also possible to understand the antitheses as a contrast between those who assess Paul by worldly standards and either other people who assess
standards, or God’s assessment of him. However, with the exception of “deceiver” (6:8b), the first part of each antithesis was a real part of Paul’s life. He admitted to being unknown, dying, beaten, sorrowful, poor, and having nothing. Thus, another alternative is to view the pairs as concurrent, albeit paradoxical.

It is, perhaps, best to understand the first pair as transitional. While the grammatical structure is the same as those that follow, the content is more like the two previous antitheses. Paul’s argument so far has made it clear that some people thought he was a deceiver. And yet he was true or genuine; his integrity is a theme all the way through this defence of his apostolic ministry. The remaining antitheses can then be understood as expressing paradoxical, but complementary, truths about Paul’s ministry.

In a sense Paul was unknown or unrecognised; many did not accept the validity of his message or ministry. And yet some people did, and certainly Paul argued that he was recognised by God. Paul had already gone to some length to expound the principle that both death and life were at work within him (4:10-12). “Beaten and yet not killed” is also a previously stated reality (4:9). That Paul experienced much sorrow is undisputed, and yet on more than one occasion in the Corinthian correspondence alone (1 Cor 16:17; 2 Cor 7:4, 7, 9; 13:9), not to mention other letters, he affirmed that he also rejoiced. The evidence is clear that Paul was poor, at least in material terms, and yet there is the affirmation not only that he “possessed everything”, but also that he made others rich (6:6). Already in this letter he had insisted that what he had gone through had been for the benefit of others (1:6-7; 4:12, 15).
Each of these antitheses can be understood as an example of following the pattern of Christ who was “crucified as a result of weakness, but lives as a result of God’s power” (13:4). Being unknown or unrecognised, dying, being beaten, always being sorrowful, being poor and having nothing, can be understood as concrete examples of sharing in Christ’s weakness. Equally, being known or recognised, living and not being killed, rejoicing, making others rich and possessing all things, can be understood as an expression of living with Christ “as a result of God’s power”. While Paul used a well-known genre, that of the “hardship catalogue”, he used it not to draw attention to his own achievements or his own self-sufficiency in the face of hardship. Instead he used it to reiterate once more his paradigm for ministry: divine power, not human power.

**Call for a Response (2 Cor 6:11-7:4)**

In this letter Paul had spoken openly, frankly and without reserve or restriction. He had spoken as a father to his beloved children, and now he called for a response. He wanted them to respond with corresponding openness (6:13). He reiterated his own integrity, his concern for them and his pride in them (7:2-4), as well as his desire to have a restored relationship with them: “to die together and to live together” (7:4). His defence of his ministry had not simply been self-defence; it had been for the purpose of restoring the Corinthians. And now as he concluded this extended defence of his ministry, he appealed to them to respond positively.

If 6:14-7:1 is regarded as an original part of this letter, then Paul also wanted them to respond with holy lives, and this is certainly congruent with what he had
written elsewhere. A positive response to him as an apostle and a positive response to the gospel message he proclaimed went hand in hand. Such a positive response was not to be limited to intellectual acknowledgement, but was also to be reflected in their lifestyle.

**Further Call for a Response (2 Corinthians 8-9)**

If 2 Corinthians 8-9 are regarded as part of the same letter as 2 Corinthians 1-7, then these chapters form an additional call for a response to Paul’s defence of his apostolic ministry. A positive response to Paul is to be expressed by generously giving to the needs of others. It forms a test of the genuineness of their love (8:8) and is an extension of Christ’s example of letting go of riches for the sake of others (8:9). The principle of God as the basis for the supply of resources is reiterated with statements such as: “God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance” (9:8a). To respond positively to this call is to give generously to the needs of others, to demonstrate their “obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ” (9:13b) as well as bringing thanksgiving to God (9:12b).

Paul concluded this section with the exclamation: “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (9:15). God’s “gift” in its various forms, but particularly in the death and resurrection of Jesus, is the basis for Paul’s ministry and the basis for his call for a positive response from the Corinthian congregation.

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28 As discussed in chapter 2, it is assumed in this work that at least 2 Corinthians 1-9, and possibly 2 Corinthians 1-13, form one letter. Thus, chapters 8-9 form a continued call for a response. However, these chapters can still be regarded as part of a call for a response to Paul and his ministry even if one or both chapters are regarded as separate letters.
Conclusion

As has been evident throughout 2 Corinthians, Paul’s paradigm for ministry, following the pattern of Christ’s death and resurrection, is once again made manifest. His ministry of reconciliation is made possible only because of Christ’s death and resurrection, for it is in this event that God acted to reconcile the world to himself. This is the message that Paul proclaimed. But not only is the message about Christ’s death and resurrection and the right relationship with God that is made possible because of it, his life and method of proclamation also fit the same pattern. Fee (1994, p 335) sums up this section like this:

What is striking in all of this is the inclusion of the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in the midst of a list that fully affirms weakness, in the form of hardship and apparent defeat (see vv. 9b-10), as a part of his apostolic ministry. … The Spirit for Paul leads not to triumphalism, but to triumph in Christ (= death in the arena, as it were), even in the midst of those things that others reject or avoid as signs of weakness and powerlessness. For Paul the power lies elsewhere, not in deliverance from hardships, but in the powerful working of the Spirit that enables and empowers him for ministry even in the midst of such adversity (Fee, 1994, p 335).

The hardships he listed in 2 Cor 6:3-10 make it clear that he did not believe that such hardship and suffering disqualified him from ministry. On the contrary, it was in the midst of those hardships that he had learned that self-sufficiency was insufficient, and thus had learned to rely on God. It was when his own power had been brought to an end in weakness (12:9), that he had learned to “live with him [Christ] as a result of God’s power” (13:4). The concept of sharing in both Christ’s suffering and his resurrection life, provide Paul with his fundamental paradigm for ministry.
Chapter 9

Ministry out of Human Weakness but in Divine Power: New Testament Passages apart from 2 Corinthians

Introduction

It has been argued in this work that Paul’s paradigm for ministry, that is, the paradigm of Christ’s death and resurrection, is set forth in 2 Cor 13:4. Following the pattern of Christ, a minister of the new covenant, a minister of reconciliation, shares both in Christ’s suffering and in God’s power. It has also been asserted that in 2 Cor 12:9 the principle is revealed that it is through weakness that the minister is brought to the place of letting go of the illusion of self-sufficiency and learns to depend on God.

A question that was raised earlier, specifically in relation to 2 Cor 12:9, was whether the interpretation put forward for that verse was reflected elsewhere in the New Testament. This question also needs to be answered with regard to the paradigm for ministry described in 2 Cor 13:4. This work has focused primarily on these statements in 2 Corinthians and established that they are supported throughout the letter. However, it is appropriate to consider whether these themes are also reflected in other parts of the NT. The most obvious place to start such a search is with 1 Corinthians, as it is the NT writing most closely related to 2 Corinthians. Moving out, then, in loose concentric circles, the next category to consider is that of other Pauline letters. This section will be subdivided, with those letters for which Pauline authorship is generally acknowledged being
considered first, followed by those where there is debate over authorship. Then other NT writings, and finally, the Gospels will be considered, with particular focus on Jesus’ words as recorded in the Gospels.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive survey. There are other passages that could, conceivably, be added. However, it is outside the scope of this work to consider any of these passages in depth. This is simply a brief survey to consider the issue of whether Paul’s paradigm for ministry – as expressed in 2 Corinthians, and in particular as it is summarised in 2 Cor 13:4, “For indeed he [Christ] was crucified as a result of weakness, but he lives as a result of God’s power. So we also, in our dealings with you, share in his weakness, but we will live with him as a result of God’s power” – is reflected elsewhere. It is also the purpose of this survey to consider the question of whether “weakness” is the catalyst for coming to a position of dependence on God, as well as to point to some areas for possible future research.

1 Corinthians

It is generally accepted that 1 Corinthians was written prior to 2 Corinthians, but probably with a time gap of no more than a year, possibly less. As it is addressed to the same congregation as 2 Corinthians, it is the most likely place to find a similar understanding of ministry as the one Paul expounded in 2 Corinthians. Even a cursory reading of 1 Corinthians reveals that some of the questions regarding Paul’s validity as an apostle that he dealt with in 2 Corinthians, were
already being asked. It can also be seen that Paul’s paradigm for ministry – out of human weakness but in divine power, with the theological underpinning of the death and resurrection of Jesus – was already in place.

1 Corinthians 1:17

This verse forms the conclusion for the section (1:10-17) where Paul raised the issue of divisions in the church. However, it also forms an introduction and transition to what Paul went on to say, introducing two topics. Firstly, it introduces Paul’s role as an apostle: “Christ did not send me to baptise but to proclaim the gospel”. He would come back to this topic in 3:1-4:13. Secondly, it introduces the relationship between human wisdom and divine wisdom, that is, the wisdom of the cross, and the irreconcilability of those two kinds of wisdom. Paul dealt with this topic first (1:18-2:16).

Paul declared that his proclamation of the Good News was οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου, ἵνα μὴ κενωθῇ ὁ σταυρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ (lit. “not in wisdom of speech so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied”). There has been considerable debate about the significance of the phrase σοφία λόγου as both words have a wide semantic range. The general consensus of opinion is that Paul was referring to the use of Greek rhetoric in a manner that was manipulative or overly ornate. As Thiselton (2000, p 143) argues:

> It is plausible to associate σοφία with practical instrumental cleverness or skill, and λόγος with calculative communication. On this basis Paul may well mean not by manipulative rhetoric (emphasis original).

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1 Especially note 1 Corinthians 9.
While he argues that “manipulative rhetoric” is perhaps the best translation, he concedes that it is a narrower and more specific translation than can be supported by the Greek. This assessment is upheld by the majority of standard translations that tend to head in that direction, but for the most part remain a little less specific.²

The element of drawing attention to oneself also seems to have been a part of Paul’s negative assessment of this method of proclamation. The divisions in the church were an indication of the emphasis people within the church placed on the personal charisma of individual leaders. Paul was not making excuses for his lack of ability in public speaking. Rather, he eschewed a method of proclamation that would draw attention to the messenger rather than to the message. As Garland (2003, p 56) concludes:

Paul is not defending his apostolic power in spite of his speaking deficiencies but attempting to undercut one of the values that has contributed to their divisions: the thirst for honor. Eloquence that elevates the status of the preacher cancels the power of the cross.

Already, early in this letter, Paul had rejected any form of proclamation that would focus on human ability, human power, to the detriment of the message of the cross (1:17).

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

The opening “for” (γιὰ) and the repetition of the key word λόγος in 1:18, indicates that this paragraph forms an elaboration on the topic introduced in the previous

verse. In contrast to a “wisdom of speech” (σοφίας λόγου) that empties the cross of its power (1:17), Paul proclaimed the “message of the cross” (ὁ λόγος γὰρ ὅ τοῦ σταυροῦ) that appeared to be “foolishness” or “stupidity” (μωρία), but was, in fact, the “power of God” (δύναμις θεοῦ ἐστὶν). The contrast between “foolishness” and “power” in this verse also introduces the concept of the fate of people based on their response to this “message” (λόγος).

In 1:19 Paul provided Scriptural support for his assertion, and then in 1:20-25 went on to explain why this “power of God” was rejected by so many. For Jews who sought miraculous signs (σημεία) as proof that God was at work, the cross was a stumbling block, a scandal (σκάνδαλον). How could someone who died under the curse of God possibly be the promised Messiah? For Greeks who sought a wisdom (σοφία) that would make sense of the world, it was utter stupidity (μωρία). How could someone executed as the worst kind of criminal be the Saviour? In human terms, the cross simply did not make sense (1:22-23).

And yet Paul insisted (1:24) that in his death on the cross, Christ was actually both the “power of God” (θεοῦ δύναμιν) and the “wisdom of God” (θεοῦ σοφία).

The shame of the cross called into question conventional wisdom about power. In the cross power was demonstrated, not in dominance over others, but in the giving up of life for the sake of others. A new paradigm was set up, one that was to be the basis for the way of life for believers, and in particular, for those who proclaimed the “message of the cross”. As has already been discussed,³ comparison of this passage with 2 Cor 2:14-16a demonstrates that the life of the

³ See chapter 6.
one who proclaims the message and the manner in which they proclaim it, must be congruent with the message. Here it is explicitly stated that it was through “the foolishness of the proclamation” (τῆς μωρότης τοῦ κηρύγματος), that God chose “to save those who believe” (1:21). And this proclamation was not to be with “wisdom of speech” (1:17); it was not to be the result of human wisdom or power. This is summed up with the statement: “For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength” (1:25). For those who “believe”, who are “called”, who are “saved”, it is trust in the “foolishness” of the cross that makes divisions in the church over personalities the real folly.

That trust bridges the gap between Jew and Greek, who become one in Christ, and reveals that God’s so-called foolishness and weakness are wiser and stronger than the so-called human wisdom that drives wedges between people. The result of God’s wisdom does seem quite outlandish. Gentiles respond to the gospel of a crucified Jewish Messiah, preached by a battered unimpressive Jewish apostle, creating a community in which Jews and Gentiles, slave and free, male and female stand together as equal before God (Garland, 2003, pp 70-71).

With this focus on the cross, the theological setting for Paul’s paradigm of ministry being in the midst of human weakness, but in God’s power, had already been set in place.

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

In this paragraph Paul gave the Corinthians a concrete example of the paradigm of human weakness but divine power: they were themselves such an example. By and large, they were not among those whom the world considered to be wise, educated, influential, powerful, prominent or noble. Most of them were among the weak, the foolish, the unimportant, the despised, the “nobodies”; but they were also among those whom God had chosen. In a society that valued wisdom, power
and social status, and could not tolerate public shame and humiliation, the “offence” of the cross was reflected in the “offence” of God’s choice of who would be his people. But God

… chose the weak not to make them strong, to help them move into the ranks of the upper crust, or to begin a new class struggle but to subvert, invert, and convert human values. … Unlike the powerful, those who are deemed foolish and weak are amenable to receiving the paradox of divine weakness that conveys strength (Garland, 2003, p 76).

Such a choice on God’s part made boasting in personal status or achievement ludicrous. In contrast to the human values of society, the crucified Messiah became the source of life, of God’s wisdom, of right relationship with God, of holiness and of redemption. In the face of such a contrast, Paul concluded the paragraph (1:31) with a loose quote from Jer 9:23 (LXX): “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” The grounds for boasting, the grounds for glory, could never be in one’s own achievements or status, but only “in the Lord”.

This paradigm would set the scene for Paul to say later: “Our competency is from God” (2 Cor 3:5); “We have this treasure in clay jars so that this extraordinary power might be of God and not come from ourselves” (2 Cor 4:7); and “My grace is sufficient for you; for power is brought to an end in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). Girard (1981, p 148) sums up this paradigm as follows:

In God’s topsy-turvy approach to power He takes weak, scarred, scared, struggling, failing, and ineffective people and accomplishes His mighty work with such miserably inadequate tools. In God’s foolish design, He can only fulfil His goals in the visibly, admittedly weak.

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Having used the Corinthian congregation as an example of the point he wanted to make, Paul then used himself as an example. The general principle that he had
expounded in 1:18-25, he went on to apply specifically to himself. What Paul proclaimed was the “mystery of God” (τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ; 2:1), the focus of which was “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (Τηροῦν Χριστὸν καὶ τούτον ἐσταυρωμένον; 2:2). But in doing this, Paul distanced himself from the type of oratory prized by so many in Corinth. He did not proclaim it with “eloquent words or wisdom” (ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἤ σοφίας; 2:1), that is, the sort of rhetorical oratory that he had previously disparaged as that which would “empty the cross of its power” (1:17). Instead, his proclamation came in the context of weakness, fear and trembling (2:3). The details of this weakness and fear are not spelled out. The vision of Acts 18:9-11, with the encouragement not to be afraid but to speak, would seem to suggest that Paul faced specific circumstances that would have engendered fear (Fee, 1987, p 94). However, as the phrase “fear and trembling” is often used in the LXX of a humble response to God, he may have been emphasising that his approach to proclaiming the gospel was one of humility and that he rejected “the kind of speech which is marked by arrogance” (Savage, 1996, p 73). This view would appear to be supported by the fact that his approach was the result of deliberate choice: “For I decided…” (ἐκρίνα; 2:2). As Garland (2003, p 84) concludes:

His style was not attributable to some rhetorical ineptitude on his part but to a conscious decision. He intended to proclaim the gospel in ways that were consonant with its message of Jesus Christ crucified and in ways that caused hearers to concentrate on the message and not on the messenger. He deliberately chose to set aside any methods that would showcase his own knowledge and wisdom.

Fee (1987, p 96) argues that what Paul was rejecting was “not preaching, not even persuasive preaching; rather, it [was] the real danger in all preaching – self-reliance”.
While Paul’s proclamation of the gospel did not have the sort of “power” the Corinthians might have expected, it did have power: God’s power. His seemingly weak proclamation was accompanied by the power of the Spirit of God to change lives. He concluded the paragraph with the reason for his approach: “So that your faith might rest not on human wisdom, but on the power of God” (2:5). Here Paul came back to the point with which he began in 1:18: the message of the cross of Christ seemed to be stupid, but was, in fact, God’s saving power. Once again, Paul’s paradigm of ministry out of human weakness, but in divine power, and on the basis of the example of Jesus’ death and resurrection, is evident.

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

While Paul rejected human wisdom, he did indeed proclaim wisdom, God’s wisdom (2:6-7). If the world’s wisdom had actually been wisdom, Christ would not have been crucified (2:8). God’s wisdom has a much greater depth, more depth than can be fathomed by human beings, but through the Spirit of God it has been revealed (2:10). From a purely human perspective, God’s wisdom cannot be fathomed, but from a spiritual perspective, a perspective that is a gift from God (2:12), there can be discernment, for “we have the mind of Christ” (2:16). Once again there is a contrast between functioning on the basis of human wisdom and functioning on the basis of divine wisdom. True wisdom can only be discerned through God’s gift of the Spirit, not through any human ability.

1 Corinthians 3:18-4:5

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul revisited the topic of his role as an apostle. The behaviour of the Corinthian congregation, especially regarding the divisions
within the church caused by people aligning themselves with particular leaders, meant that Paul could not address them as the mature Christians one might have expected them to be by this time. Instead, he had to explain that different leaders had different roles, but that the source of the “growth”, the source of the ministry, was God. Yes, each person was responsible for their part, and would be judged according to how they had contributed to the well-being or otherwise of the church, but the basis for such contributions was not human wisdom.

Paul’s admonition in 3:18 highlighted the folly of self-deception (μηδείς ἑαυτῶν ἐξαπατάτω). Reliance on human wisdom was not real wisdom. It was only in becoming “fools” – at least in the eyes of the world – that they genuinely would become wise. In 3:19-20 Paul backed up his claim with two OT quotations (Job 5:13; Ps 94:11) that highlighted the futility of reliance on human wisdom. In comparison to God’s wisdom (παρὰ τῷ θεῷ), the wisdom of this world (ἡ γὰρ σοφία τοῦ κόσμου τούτου) was folly (μωρία). This would have drawn the readers’ thoughts back to the argument of 1:18-25. In preparation for applying the principle to the appropriate attitude towards leaders, Paul returned to the “reversal” that is inherent in the cross.

Paul’s immediate application focused on attitudes towards leaders. Because of the “upside-down” nature of God’s approach, the Corinthian congregation should not have viewed themselves as “belonging” to various leaders, especially when this placed them in opposition to those who “belonged” to a different leader. Rather leaders were to be regarded as “belonging” to the church, albeit with a strong qualification. The notion of leaders “belonging” to the church was to be
understood in the context of all belonging to Christ (3:23) and, as Paul would go on to explain, it was as “servants of Christ, stewards of God’s mysteries” (ὑπηρέτας Χριστοῦ καὶ οἰκονόμως μυστηρίων θεοῦ, 4:1; cf. 3:5) who were accountable to God (4:2-5).

Again Paul highlighted the contrast between human wisdom and divine wisdom, this time in the specific context of Christian leadership. Such leadership was not to be based on human wisdom. A worldly view places those who follow a leader as “belonging” to that leader. In God’s wisdom, it is the other way around. Christian leadership was to be carried out on the basis of God’s wisdom, rather than on the basis of human wisdom. And this principle needed to be understood not only by those who “led”, but also by those who “followed”. Once again the reversal of human wisdom that was demonstrated in the cross was to be demonstrated in the life of the church.

1 Corinthians 4:6-13

With the phrase “I have applied all of this to Apollos and myself for your benefit” (μετασχημάτισα εἰς ἑαυτὸν καὶ Ἀπολλὼν δι’ ἴμας; 4:6), Paul made it explicit that he had been using the experiences of Apollos and himself as leaders to help the Corinthians to understand an aspect of God’s wisdom. If they functioned in God’s wisdom they would not cause divisions by favouring one leader over another. And they would not boast in their own status and achievements. Paul asked the cutting questions: “Who makes you any different? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?” (4:7). He reminded them that all they had was from God. Already in
this letter Paul had reminded them that it was by God’s power that they had been saved (1:18); it was God who had called them and chosen them (1:26-28); God was the source of their life and in Christ they had God’s wisdom (1:29); and they had received God’s Spirit in order to understand God’s gifts (2:12). Later in the letter he would go on to remind them that it is God who activates all the different gifts (12:6); it is God who appoints leaders in the church (12:28); and it will be God who gives the final victory over sin and death (15:57).

They had received so much, and yet the irony of the next verses reveals their self-centred and self-important attitude. They thought they had “arrived”. Their “wisdom”, human wisdom, had brought them to the point of arrogance, of thinking they were better than others. This was in stark contrast to the experience of the apostles; instead of “reigning” (4:8), they were “exhibited last of all, as those sentenced to death” (4:9). The image is that of the arena where prisoners were put on display and forced to fight to the death. This is a similar image to that of being led as a prisoner in a Roman triumphal procession (2 Cor 2:14). In both passages, God was the one who exhibited the apostles as being led to death: in one as prisoners sentenced to die in the arena (1 Cor 4:9a), in the other as prisoners led to their execution at the conclusion of the triumphal procession (2 Cor 2:14a). And in both passages the result was a proclamation of the wisdom of the cross to the world; in one as a “spectacle to the whole world” (1 Cor 4:9b), in the other as the “aroma” that “spreads in every place” both to those who are saved and those who are perishing (2 Cor 2:14b-16a).
Thus, in both passages, the role of the apostle is characterised by “death”, a
death which reveals the knowledge of God. The parallels ... make it clear,
therefore, that for Paul the “knowledge of God” to be revealed in the
apostolic ministry is the power and wisdom of God found in the cross, while
the way in which it is revealed is not limited to the apostolic preaching, but
also includes the apostle’s own “sentence of death” (Hafemann, 1990a
pp 58-59).

In contrast to the Corinthians who saw themselves as wise, strong and held in
honour (4:10) in spite of the fact that, in human terms, they were not (1:26), the
apostles were fools, weak and held in disrepute (4:10), not only in the eyes of the
world, it would seem, but also in the eyes of the Corinthian Christians. The
apostles were concrete examples of God’s choice of the “foolish in the world to
shame the wise”, the “weak in the world to shame the strong” and the “low and
despised in the world, the things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are”
(1:27-28).

Paul went on to list six hardships: hunger, thirst, dressed in rags, harassed,
homeless, and physical labour (4:11-12a) – all characteristics of those the world
would class as the unimportant, the “nobodies”. Then he listed three responses to
abuse: blessing, endurance and kind words in response to reviling, persecution
and slander (4:12b-13a). He concluded with a summary of the world’s opinion of
such people: they were regarded as “the rubbish of the world” (περὶκαθάρματα τοῦ
κόσμου) and “the dregs of all things” (πάντων περίψημα, 4:13b). The time
indicators, “to the present hour” (ἀχρὶ τῆς ἁρτί ἀραζ, 4:11a) and “until now” (ἐως
ἁρτί, 4:13c) indicate that this was an ongoing pattern rather than an isolated
incident.

Instead of self-sufficiency and boasting, the apostles exhibited the pattern of the
cross, the pattern of suffering, which in reality was true wisdom:
Paul’s point is singular. In contrast to the Corinthians, who are “filled, rich, ruling, wise, powerful, honoured,” he and his fellow apostles look far more like their Lord (Fee, 1987, p 181).

Once again, the pattern of Christ who was “crucified as a result of weakness, but lives as a result of God’s power” (2 Cor 13:4) was Paul’s paradigm for ministry.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

This passage forms the beginning of an extended discussion of spiritual gifts, including their purpose and their use in the church (1 Cor 12-14). What is made abundantly clear in these few verses, and is reiterated and elaborated on in the following chapters, is that these gifts for ministry are from God. Paul was adamant that while there is a variety of gifts for ministry, all such gifts owe their source to “the same Spirit … the same Lord … the same God” (12:4-6). All of these gifts are for the benefit of the whole congregation (12:7), and they all have the same source and are activated by the same Spirit (12:11). It is easy to forget that these gifts are just that, gifts, and to begin to function as if they were inherent human qualities. The danger that a person can function as if these gifts were human resources is a real one. But if ministry is to be effective, there must be an understanding that spiritual gifts come from God and that it is only in reliance on God that these gifts can be used in such a way as to fulfil their intended purpose. Once again the principle of ministry being conducted as a result of divine, not human resources, is strongly affirmed.

1 Corinthians 15

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul provided an extensive discussion of the resurrection. He began with the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection, moved to the general principle of
resurrection from the dead and its implications for the Christian faith, and then discussed the nature of the resurrection body.

Paul made it explicit that Christian faith is dependent on the resurrection of Jesus. Here not only “ministry”, but Christian life is dependent on the resurrection, and by implication, the death of Jesus. The pattern for the Christian is Jesus, such that what is “sown in weakness” is “raised in power” (15:42).

He concluded the chapter with a call to be “steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord” (15:58). This constitutes a call to hard work, but also comes with the acknowledgement that it is “in the Lord” that such work “is not in vain”. The need for reliance on God is implicit.

**Summary of 1 Corinthians**

In numerous places in 1 Corinthians, Paul’s paradigm for ministry, that is, sharing in both Christ’s suffering and God’s power is both implicit and explicit. That Christian life and ministry can only be conducted with divine resources, not human resources, is a principle that underlies Paul’s approach to dealing with the various issues in the church in Corinth. It is the pattern of the death and resurrection of Jesus that, contrary to popular human opinion, is both God’s wisdom and God’s power, and as such is the source and pattern for Christian life and ministry. The paradigm for ministry so obvious in 2 Corinthians is clearly present in 1 Corinthians as well.
Other Acknowledged Pauline Epistles

It has been demonstrated that the same paradigm for ministry that Paul presented in 2 Corinthians also exists in 1 Corinthians. The next step is to investigate whether there is evidence of the same paradigm in other Pauline letters.

Romans 8:26-27

Here, in the context of describing life in the Spirit, Paul envisaged a situation of human weakness, in particular, the inability to know how to pray. In this circumstance, “the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words” (8:26), and does so “according to God’s will” (8:27). Once again Paul presented a scenario where human ability is insufficient for ministry, this time the ministry of prayer. Here, it is achieved not simply with God’s power, but it is God himself, in the person of the Spirit, who is adequate to the task. When it comes to prayer, the “clay jar” of human frailty means that prayer is not conducted in power that has a human source, but in the extraordinary power of God (2 Cor 4:7).

Romans 15:14-21

In explaining why he had dared to write so boldly to the Christians in Rome, Paul reiterated that his call “to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God” (15:16) was “because of the grace given me by God” (15:15). It was because the source of his ministry was God that he could venture to boast in the work he had done for God (15:17). But it was not really what he had done, for he immediately qualified the statement with “I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me.” The signs and wonders, the proclamation of the good news, had been “by the
power of the Spirit of God” (15:19). So adamant was Paul that his ministry was the result of God’s doing, that there are no less than four phrases in this paragraph, including at least one reference to each person of the Godhead, that point to this: “because of the grace given me by God” (15:15), “in Christ Jesus” (15:17), “what Christ has accomplished through me” (15:18), and “by the power of the Spirit of God” (15:19). Paul’s summary of his ministry in Romans was consistent with his earlier statement to the Corinthians: “our competence is from God” (2 Cor 3:5), and with his statement that as he shared in Christ’s weakness, so too would he live with him and deal with the Corinthians “as a result of God’s power” (2 Cor 13:4).

**Galatians 2:19-20**

A large proportion of Galatians 1-2 is devoted to Paul’s vindication of his apostleship. The gospel he proclaimed was not of human origin (1:11); rather he had received it “through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:12). It was a gospel that proclaimed that people are put right with God by “faith in Jesus Christ” and not as a result of “works of the law” (2:16). In the context of explaining that because he had been put right with God through faith and he was no longer subject to the law, Paul stated:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal 2:19b-20).

The paradigm of divine power rather than human power, based on the death and resurrection of Christ, is here applied specifically to Paul’s life and ministry as a Christian, and by implication, to Christian life and ministry generally. It is only by faith in the Son of God, and by the power of the indwelling Christ, that a life
based on God’s grace can be lived. For Paul identification with Christ in his death resulted in living in the power of his resurrection rather than by the human effort of keeping the Law. In some passages Paul can be understood to put the emphasis on the cross. In the lists of hardships, for example, it can seem that the emphasis is on the weakness and affliction, on the “Christ was crucified as a result of weakness” (2 Cor 13:4a) side of the equation. However, even here the other side of the equation, “he was raised by the power of God” (2 Cor 13:4b) can also be seen (note particularly 2 Cor 4:8-12; 6:4-10). In this passage the emphasis is clearly on living in the power of Christ who was crucified, but now lives: “The risen Christ is the operative power in the new order, as sin was in the old” (Bruce, 1982, p 144).

**Galatians 4:12-15**

Paul moved from his own experience to the Galatians’ experience of life in the Spirit, and then supported his argument from Scripture, in particular, with the example of Abraham. In Gal 4:12 he returned to his own experience. It had been “through weakness of flesh” (ἡ δὲ αθέτησιν τῆς σαρκὸς, 4:13) – most likely a physical illness – that Paul had first proclaimed the good news to the recipients of this letter. At that time they had welcomed him as a “messenger of God” (ὁ δὲ γεγέλαν τὸ θεὸ, 4:14), and he called on them to do so again (4:15-16). Here is an example of what it meant for Paul to proclaim the good news in human weakness; not in his own power, but in God’s power. Their acceptance of the good news in spite of Paul’s weakness demonstrated that God was at work. If, as some believe, the physical weakness he endured in Galatia was the same as that referred to as
the “thorn in the flesh”, then this becomes a direct fulfilment of the Lord’s words to Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you; for power is brought to an end in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9).

Philippians 2:12-13

At the conclusion of the Christological hymn in Phil 2:6-11, Paul resumed his exhortation under the heading of his injunction in 1:27: “Only live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”. In his absence he called on the Philippians to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). There has been much debate as to what “working out” one’s own salvation might mean, but it is clear from the following verse that the ability to do so comes from God, “for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). This passage demonstrates that functioning in God’s power does not mean doing nothing, the proverbial “let go and let God”. Rather, it involves an active working on the part of the believer, but this is done through God’s enabling. It is apparent from Paul’s letters, and especially in those parts of his letters where he lists some of the hardships he had faced for the sake of the gospel, that in his life and ministry, he had worked very hard and had struggled against much opposition. In a very real sense he had been “working out” his own salvation. And yet at the same time, in the midst of the most intense affliction, he was able to say that he had learned to “rely on the God who raises the dead” (2 Cor 1:9).

Philippians 3:7-11

In Phil 3:4-7, Paul responded to the implied claims of some false teachers. He listed some of the characteristics and qualifications which, in human terms, could be expected to qualify him for ministry: his Jewish heritage and his zeal for the Law. His encounter with Christ, however, caused a radical re-evaluation of what constituted qualification for ministry. What he had previously valued, he now counted as “loss” (ζημία, 3:7) and “rubbish” (σκυβαλόν, 3:8). The reason was that he had come to realise that right relationship with God was not something of his own doing; it was not based on the Law. Rather, it came from God and was based on faith (3:9). His aim then, in life and ministry, was to “know Christ and the power of his resurrection” (3:10). The route to this end was in the “sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death” (3:10). Once again Jesus’ death and resurrection form the paradigm for Christian life and ministry. As in Gal 2:20, there is a strong emphasis on living in resurrection power, but this is only available through sharing in the suffering. Both sides of the equation, “crucified as a result of weakness” (2 Cor 13:4a) and “raised as a result of God’s power” (2 Cor 13:4b) operate together. To be effective in ministry one must realise that it is in the midst of human weakness that human power is brought to an end, enabling the power of Christ to indwell (2 Cor 12:9-10). One must learn to rely on “the God who raises the dead” (2 Cor 1:9).

Philippians 4:10-20

Finally, Paul arrived at one of the key motivations for writing to the Philippians: to thank them for their gift. In so doing, he commented that he had learned to be content in whatever circumstances he found himself, whether favourable or
unfavourable. He summarised with the often quoted statement: “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13). The “all things” applied not to “anything and everything”, but to the circumstances of his ministry enumerated in the previous verses. Paul had learnt the secret of contentment, not just when life went smoothly, but also when times were tough. His ability to minister was not based on the circumstances of life. Rather, it was based on God’s ability to strengthen him. Once again, sufficiency for the rigours of apostolic ministry came from God. And not only sufficiency, but contentment, even in adverse circumstances.

This contentment, however, was not the self-sufficiency of the Stoic, the cultivated attitude of the wise person who could face life and death with equanimity because of his own inner resources. Paul’s sufficiency was from God and related to Christ, who alone empowered him in various situations (O’Brien, 1991, p 514).

As Paul concluded this paragraph, and in fact the letter, he broadened the application from himself to his readers with the statement: “And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

Paul had just thanked them for a monetary gift, which, given their financial situation (cf. 2 Cor 8:1-4), would have involved a significant sacrifice. Thus this supplying of needs must, surely, have included financial needs. But the tone of the letter suggests it was more than that. What Paul prayed for them in the opening of the letter is that their “love may overflow” (1:9), that they may have “knowledge and insight” (1:9), that they could “determine what is best” (1:10), that they be “pure and blameless” (1:10), and that they “produce the harvest of righteousness” (1:11). These are things that relate to Christian life, and these are the things that come “through Jesus Christ” (1:11). That sufficiency for Christian life ministry comes from God applies not only to an apostle, but indeed, to all
believers. Paul’s affirmation in Philippians of God as the source of his sufficiency and contentment is congruent with his statement in 2 Cor 12:9b-10

I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

Summary of Pauline Epistles

Paul’s paradigm of ministry is summarised in 2 Cor 13:4: “He [Christ] was crucified as a result of weakness, but he lives as a result of God’s power. So we also, in our dealings with you, share in his weakness, but we will live with him as a result of God’s power.” It can be seen that this paradigm is present not only in the Corinthian correspondence, but also in other Pauline letters. Sharing in both Jesus’ death and resurrection – in the weakness of the one and the power of the other – was integral to Paul’s understanding of Christian life and ministry.

Disputed Pauline Epistles

To varying degrees modern scholarship has disputed Pauline authorship of Ephesians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus and 2 Thessalonians. For this reason, references in these letters will be treated separately from references in the letters that are generally regarded as Pauline. For the purpose of this work, it is not necessary to make a decision on the matter of the authorship of these letters, as the broad topic of this chapter is the use of Paul’s understanding of weakness and power in ministry in the NT – including both Pauline and non-Pauline writings – outside of 2 Corinthians.
Ephesians 3:1-13

Ephesians 3 begins, “This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles.” The section that follows contains a summary of, and the underlying principle for, Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles. His ministry was to make known the “mystery of Christ” (3:4), that is, that “the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (3:6). Paul’s commissioning for such a task was by God’s grace (3:2). This commissioning, and the source of the ability to fulfil the commission, are summed up in 3:7-8a: “Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God’s grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me.” In spite of Paul’s unworthiness, his ministry was a gracious gift from God, as was the power to carry it out. As Hoehner (2002, p 451) concludes:

Paul was made a minister of the gospel and was able to carry out this awesome responsibility by the gracious gift of unmerited favour of enablement that was given to him. That enablement corresponded to the activity of God’s dynamic ability to convey the mystery. God does not give responsibility without the provision of his power to carry it out. In the end God is to be praised, for humans can neither initiate not accomplish the work in their own power.

Once again there is a congruency with Paul’s statement in 2 Cor 3:5-6a, “Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of the new covenant”.

The summary of Paul’s ministry contained in this passage arose out of clarifying the circumstances of his imprisonment. The imprisonment was the result of being a minister of Christ and it was through Christ that he had “access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him” (3:12). But the imprisonment and
sufferings were also for the benefit and glory of those to whom the letter was written (3:13). Admission of suffering and weakness were closely associated with the ministry of the gospel for the sake of others and expressions of boldness and confidence in God as the source of grace and power. This is reminiscent of 2 Cor 4:7-12 where Paul claimed “we have this treasure in clay jars so that the extraordinary power might be of God and not originate with us”, and then went on to list his sufferings and to point out that while death was at work in him, the result was life for others.

**Colossians 1:24-29**

This paragraph has much in common with Ephesians 3:1-13. Again, God’s commissioning of Paul (1:25) to proclaim the “mystery” (1:26) of the inclusion of Gentiles through Christ (1:27), is the theme. However, the link between ministry and suffering is made more explicit with the phrase, “I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (1:24b). There has been much debate as to the exact nuance of the phrase “completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions”, but what is plain is that Paul’s suffering was understood as being for the benefit of others. This has echoes of 2 Cor 1:3-11 where Paul contended that sharing in Christ’s suffering also meant sharing in his comfort and in the ability to share that comfort with others, and then went on to give the example of extreme affliction in which he learned to rely on the “God who raises the dead” (2 Cor 1:9).

The concluding statement of this passage in Colossians (1:29) demonstrates the same underlying paradigm as that expressed in 2 Corinthians: “For this I toil and
struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me”. As in Phil 2:12-13, Paul’s struggle and hard work are not underestimated, but the strength to carry them out was not his own; it was strength that was powerfully energised within him by God.

**Summary of Disputed Pauline Epistles**

Any of these passages regarded as Pauline adds to the evidence that Paul’s understanding of ministry as a result of dependence on God is not confined to the Corinthian correspondence, but tends to permeate his writing as a whole. Even if not written by Paul, they at least purport to be his and thus describe his ministry. Alternatively, they can be understood to add to the evidence that suggests the paradigm was not limited to Paul.

**Other New Testament Writings**

The paradigm for ministry that Paul expounded in 2 Corinthians is clearly not limited to his interaction with the church in Corinth. It was a paradigm that underlay his entire ministry. The question now, however, is whether this paradigm was limited to Paul or whether it can be found elsewhere.

**Acts 3**

In Acts 3 the story of Peter and John healing the crippled man at the temple gate and its aftermath is narrated. In his instruction to the man to get up and walk, Peter was clear that the instructions were given “in the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (3:6). His question to the crowd in response to their astonishment also made
apparent that the power for the healing came from God and not from the apostles
themselves: “You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us,
as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?” (3:12).

While the paradigm for ministry is not made explicit in the way it is in Paul’s
writings, it is obvious that Peter and John had a clear understanding the power for
ministry came from God and not from them.

2 Peter 1:3

The first chapter of 2 Peter forms an exhortation to holy living. Verse 3
introduces the crucial resource for fulfilling such a calling: “His divine power has
given us everything needed for life and godliness.” The focus here is broad;
divine power is viewed as necessary for any believer to live a holy life. As in Phil
2:12, there is also a call for the believer to “make every effort” (1:5); it is not a
passive waiting for God’s power, but an active doing. And it is in the sure
knowledge that the divine resources necessary are available to the believer, for in
response to making every effort, “entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and
Saviour Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you” (1:11).

James 1:5

In the context of encouraging believers to endure testing, James urged them, “If
any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and
ungrudgingly, and it will be given you” (1:5). Once again the resources needed
for Christian living are seen as having their source in God, and the supply of these
resources is in the context of facing “testing”. This is a similar pattern to
2 Corinthians where acknowledgment of suffering and affliction is often closely associated with statements about God being the source of power in the face of such difficulties.

Summary of Other NT Writings

While the paradigm of ministry conducted in God’s power rather than human power is not as explicit in NT writings other than Paul’s, the underlying principle does appear to be present in such a way as to be congruent with Paul’s writings, in particular with 2 Corinthians. It would seem that others besides Paul had an understanding that their resources for Christian life and ministry came from God rather than from themselves.

Gospels

If this understanding of ministry being conducted in God’s power is a generally accepted principle by the early Christians, or even if it is viewed as uniquely Pauline, it begs the question of where such an understanding came from. A likely source would be the life and teaching of Jesus. Accordingly, the final section in this chapter will explore the question of whether this paradigm is present in Jesus’ life and teaching, particularly in his teaching as described in the gospels.


Matthew (20:20-28) and Mark (10:35-45) both report an incident late in Jesus’ ministry where, in the context of Jesus having just predicted his suffering and
death, there was a request by, or on behalf of, the sons of Zebedee, that they be
given positions of honour when Jesus came into his kingdom. While some of the
details differ between the two accounts, they clearly refer to the same incident.

Jesus’ first response was to draw their attention back to his upcoming suffering
and ask James and John if they were prepared to share in it. They answered in the
affirmative, but it is far from certain that they understood what they were saying.
Nevertheless, Jesus affirmed their sharing with him in suffering. Sharing in Jesus’
suffering was also a key component of Paul’s understanding of ministry in God’s
power (cf. 2 Corinthians 1).

Jesus’ second response was to address the issue of what constituted greatness.
Unlike the pattern of leadership among the Gentiles, in Jesus’ kingdom leadership
and greatness are not about “lording it over” others; they are about serving others.
The path to greatness is by becoming a slave. Jesus used himself as an example:
“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom
for many” (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45). Jesus demonstrated being a servant to the
point of giving his life for others. That was true greatness. John (13:1-20)
records Jesus’ demonstration of being a servant in a more immediate way with the
story of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet. This incident put Jesus’ teaching into
practice in a very concrete and observable way. Luke (22:24-27) records a
similar, but shorter story to Matthew and Mark, where there was a dispute about
greatness. Here Jesus asked whether the person who sat at the table or the person
who served the one at the table was the greater. From a human perspective, it was
obviously the one who sat at the table. And yet Jesus came as one who served. In
addition to the pericope mentioned above, Mark (9:33-37) records an incident in the vicinity of Capernaum where the question of greatness arose. After arriving in Capernaum, Jesus asked them what they had been discussing on the way, and used a child to illustrate the principle that the one who would be great must serve others. And in the context of Jesus’ denouncing the scribes and Pharisees, Matthew (23:11-12) records yet another incident where Jesus stated that the way to greatness was to be a servant.

While these passages do not explicitly express Paul’s paradigm of ministry being conducted in God’s power rather than human power, they do point to the “upside-down” character of Jesus’ approach in contrast to that of the world. They set the scene for Paul’s claim that the foolishness of the cross was “the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24).


Each of the Synoptic Gospels includes the pericope in which, after predicting his death, Jesus makes the statement, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it” (with only slight variations Matt 16:24b-25; Mark 8:34b-35; Luke 9:23b-24). John (12:24-25) reports Jesus making a similar statement not long before his death and in response to some Greeks who wanted to meet him. Luke (17:33) also records Jesus making a similar statement in the context of discussing what the coming of the kingdom of God will be like.
The rejection that would culminate in Jesus’ death would not be limited to Jesus; the image of the shame of the cross calls those who would follow him to accept rejection as well. There is a choice. A person can seek life by pursuing the acceptance of the world, but this will inevitably result in death. Or a person can give their life for Jesus’ sake, which paradoxically will result in gaining life. This is a similar contrast to that between human wisdom and divine wisdom presented in 1 Corinthians 1 and the contrasting responses of those who are “perishing” and those who are “being saved” (1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15-16a). It also aligns with Paul’s understanding of the death and resurrection of Jesus as the theological basis for ministry, as well as his images of being led to death in the arena (1 Cor 4:9) and in the Roman triumphal procession (2 Cor 2:14).

Without me you can do nothing (John 15:1-11; cf. John 4:34; 5:17-19, 30; 8:26-29)

Three times, and in two separate incidents, John records Jesus saying, “I (can) do nothing on my own” (5:17-19, 30; 8:26-29). In John 5 questions had arisen regarding Jesus healing on the Sabbath. Twice Jesus maintained that he did not act on his own, but did his Father’s will. In John 9 Jesus predicted his death in the context of the negative response to his teaching at the Festival in Jerusalem. In both cases Jesus’ right to judge was brought into question (5:22; 8:16). Jesus had the right to judge – and to heal and raise the dead – because that right was given him by the Father. Previously (John 4), when the disciples had brought food to Jesus while he was waiting at Jacob’s well, Jesus had stated, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work” (4:34). Clearly, Jesus’ paradigm for ministry was one of dependence on the Father.
In that part of his farewell discourse recorded in John 15, Jesus used the image of a vine grower and a vine with branches to illustrate his disciples’ dependence on him. Just as a branch only continues to live and to bear fruit while it is attached to the vine, so the disciples would only “bear fruit” while they continued to “abide” in Jesus. Just as the vine is dependent on the vine grower, so the branches are dependent on the vine. This is summed up in 15:5: “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” With this vivid picture, Jesus’ paradigm of ministry in dependence on his Father was explicitly extended to his disciples. This is a clear precedent for Paul’s paradigm of sufficiency for ministry coming from God (2 Cor 3:5) and of learning to rely on “the God who raises the dead” (2 Cor 1:9).

Summary of Gospels

Jesus’ teaching regarding true greatness sets the scene for Paul’s later contrast between human wisdom and divine wisdom. What seems wise from a human perspective is foolishness from God’s perspective. And God’s “upside-down” and “back-to-front” way of working, which seems to be foolish when viewed from a purely human perspective, is in fact, wisdom and power. Likewise, Jesus’ teaching about losing one’s life in order to save it, sets the scene for Paul’s paradigm of ministry based on the pattern of Jesus being “crucified as a result of weakness, but raised as a result of God’s power” (2 Cor 13:4). More explicitly, there is a direct parallel between Jesus’ pattern of ministry in dependence on his Father and his instruction to his disciples to “abide” in him, and Paul’s understanding of ministry in dependence on God.
Conclusion

Paul’s paradigm for ministry as set out in 2 Corinthians is summarised in 13:4:

“For indeed he [Christ] was crucified as a result of weakness, but he lives as a result of God’s power. So we also, in our dealings with you, share in his weakness, but we will live with him as a result of God’s power.”

It has been demonstrated that this paradigm is not limited to 2 Corinthians. It clearly extends not only into 1 Corinthians, but also into others of Paul’s letters. It would seem to be the paradigm for his entire ministry. But there are also hints that this paradigm was not limited to Paul, and that it was an underlying principle for other NT writers as well. Although the Gospels were composed after Paul’s letters, the evidence they contain suggests that the apostle is very likely to have been influenced by the form of the Jesus tradition known to him. As Jesus ministered in dependence on his Father, so too, for the believer, life and ministry is to be conducted in dependence on God.

There is room for further exploration into the significance of each of the passages mentioned above. This is particularly the case for Pauline epistles other than 2 Corinthians, especially 1 Corinthians. Jesus’ sayings highlighted above could also be the subject of further research. It is, however, outside the scope of this work to consider these passages in any way other than this very brief overview. But what is within the scope of this work, and now remains to be considered, at least briefly, is what the implications of this might be for ministry in the twenty-first century.
Chapter 10

Findings and Conclusion

The Context of Paul’s Paradigm for Ministry

Paul began 1 Corinthians with a discussion about the foolishness of the cross. The crucifixion was an offence, a scandal to Jews. How could anyone who died under the curse of God – as someone who died by being hung on a cross clearly was – possibly be God’s Messiah? Besides, the Messiah was supposed to free God’s people from foreign oppression, and this was not something Jesus had done. In fact quite the opposite: he had been executed as a criminal by the foreign power that popular expectation believed he should have removed.

If worshiping Jesus was a problem for the Jews, it was no less a problem for the Greeks. To worship a criminal who had been executed by crucifixion, a fate reserved for the worst of criminals and insurrectionists, was utter stupidity. But Paul maintained that what was stupidity from a human perspective, was in fact wisdom from God’s perspective. What was, from a human perspective, the ultimate demonstration of weakness, was in fact a demonstration of God’s power because through the weakness of the cross, God had made salvation available to human beings.

At the end of 2 Corinthians, Paul returned to this topic and related it specifically to his own ministry. Just as Christ had been crucified in weakness but had been raised as a result of God’s power, so Paul’s ministry as an apostle was carried out
in weakness, but he also shared in the resurrection power of Christ. This was
Paul’s paradigm for ministry: his weakness, but God’s power, patterned on Jesus’
death and resurrection. It has been demonstrated that this is a paradigm that is
present in much of Paul’s writing, but is particularly prominent in 2 Corinthians.

Paul was an apostle who was radically different from the expectations of many in
the Corinthian church. He was not the embodiment of success, influence, power
or eloquence they might have hoped for. Instead, he was weak, sick, persecuted,
afflicted and suffering. And then to add insult to injury, he had the audacity to tell
them that his weakness was actually proof that he was genuine! What has come
down to us as 2 Corinthians is Paul’s defence of his model of apostleship: his
insistence that the appropriate model for ministry was one where divine power
was demonstrated in the presence of human weakness. This was the model
because it reflected the pattern of Jesus who was “crucified as a result of
weakness, but lives as a result of God’s power” (2 Cor 13:4).

Passages where Paul’s Paradigm for Ministry is Evidenced

2 Corinthians 1:3-11

After only a brief initial greeting, Paul launched into a benediction of praise for
“the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our distress” (1:3-4). He went on
to elaborate on what were, for him, two key concepts and the relationship between
those concepts, that is, suffering (πάθημα) or affliction (θλίψις) and comfort or
encouragement (παράκλησις/ παρακαλέω). Accusations apparent in various places
in both 1 and 2 Corinthians indicate that at least some in Corinth felt that his
affliction disqualified him from being an apostle. But Paul maintained that, rather
that being a disqualification, it was actually a demonstration of his apostleship.
For when he was afflicted, he received God’s comfort, and both the affliction and
the comfort were for the benefit of the Corinthians. Thus, through the opening
benediction Paul provided the theological basis for a defence of suffering and
affliction as part of his apostolic ministry.

As he expounded these themes, Paul gave an example of God working through his
suffering in a very dramatic way. While in Asia he had experienced an affliction
where he had become convinced that he would not survive, and yet God had
rescued him. While this was an example of what he had been explaining about
the relationship between suffering and comfort, it was much more than that. For
the reason Paul gave for the experience was not so that he would be able to
comfort others, but so that he would learn to “rely on God who raises the dead”
(1:9).

Here, in stark contrast to other descriptions of afflictions he had undergone in the
course of ministry, Paul gave only sketchy information about the details of the
event. Instead, using very intense language, he emphasised his emotional
response and the theological significance of that response. This work concludes
that this “near-death experience” impacted much of what Paul wrote in the
remainder of the letter. What he had learned through this event would become the
backdrop against which he would defend his ministry. Through this experience
the principle of relying on God rather than relying on oneself had been
compellingly reinforced. The situation had forced him to abandon self-reliance
and any pretence of self-sufficiency and rely solely on God. This is a principle that has been shown to have been reiterated in a number of different ways in the rest of 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6

In 2:14-3:6 Paul described and defended his apostleship as new covenant ministry. He did this by a series of metaphors and rhetorical questions. Firstly, Paul likened being a minister of Christ to being led as a captive in a Roman triumphal procession (καταγραμματευόμενος). This presupposed having previously been conquered, and brought to mind the fate of those in such a procession. That fate was usually – unless the one whose procession it was showed mercy – to be executed. The purpose was to demonstrate the superior power and authority of the victor. Examination of the image of the Roman triumphal procession confirms that Paul pictured himself as one being led to death for the sake of Christ.

Paul then likened being a minister to the wafting aroma of sacrifice. Incense was burned in the context of the Roman triumphal procession, but Paul’s choice of words also suggests an allusion to the aroma of OT cultic sacrifices. It was as the apostle was such an aroma that the knowledge of God was spread abroad – with eternal consequences. It was a perfume to those who were being saved, but an awful stench to those who were perishing (2:15-16a). A comparison of these verses with 1 Cor 1:18 strongly supports the need for congruity between the content of message, the method of proclamation, and way of life of the one who proclaims it. This means that the message of the cross was always to be lived out by the one who proclaimed that message. How the message of the cross was
demonstrated in the way Paul proclaimed the message is described in 1 Cor 1:17: it was not with eloquent wisdom (οὐκ ἐν σοφία, λόγου). Paul maintained that to proclaim it in such a way would have been to empty the cross of its power; his eloquent speech rather than the power of the cross could have been given the credit for success. And the way the paradigm of the cross was demonstrated in Paul’s life is made explicit in 2 Cor 2:14-16. It was as he was led to death as a captive in God’s triumphal procession that he became the means through which “the aroma of the knowledge of God was spread in every place”; that Paul “became the fragrance of Christ to God” (2 Cor 2:14b-15a).

Both Paul’s argument and his approach to ministry support the conclusion that the message of the cross, the manner in which it is proclaimed, and the lifestyle of the person who proclaims it, must all fit the same pattern. Not only does the minister proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus, their ministry must also follow the same pattern, that is, sharing both in Christ’s suffering and in the power of his resurrection. Thus, Paul’s suffering for the sake of the gospel, far from invalidating his standing as an apostle, actually endorsed it. It is apparent that Paul believed that because he suffered, because he proclaimed the gospel in God’s power rather than with eloquent human wisdom, his apostleship was valid.

Instead of using “noble” images to illustrate his ministry as an apostle, Paul used images of weakness: the image of being led as a captive and the image of being the aroma of a sacrifice. But even with such “weak” images, Paul claimed to be adequate for the task (3:16b). In contrast to the apparent claims of some others, Paul’s sufficiency came not from himself, but from God. He was not the victor in
the triumphal procession; he was the defeated captive. It was from a position of weakness and defeat that he became the aroma of the knowledge of God. He spoke (2:17b) and functioned as a minister of the new covenant (3:4-6), as one who was sent by God (2:17c), whose responsibilities were carried out in the presence of God (2:17d; 3:4c), and who laboured as he did because of his relationship to Christ (2:17b; 3:4b). The Corinthians themselves were the evidence that this was the case (3:2). Thus, he carried out his ministry with confidence (3:4a), in the knowledge that his competency for ministry did not come from himself (3:5a), but came from God (3:5b). Once again the contrast between human power and divine power is evident in Paul’s defence of his apostolic ministry.

2 Corinthians 4:1-12

This same principle, that is, that ministry can only be conducted in God’s power and not in human power, is reiterated with the statement in 2 Cor 4:1: “Therefore, since by God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart”. It was through God’s enabling, expressed here as God’s mercy, that Paul could face the difficulties, the suffering, the persecution, that apostolic ministry brought.

This is made even more explicit in 4:7: “We have this treasure in clay jars, so that this extraordinary power might be of God, and not come from us.” Paul had just given a summary of his approach to ministry: it was with integrity both before people and, more importantly, before God. With two parallel statements, he had provided a summary of the content of his message: “the light of gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (4:4) and “the light of the knowledge of
the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:6). This is immediately followed with Paul’s image of treasure in clay jars. Such an image must have been a startling one for those in Corinth who believed that an apostle of the glorious and powerful gospel should reflect that glory and power in their life.

It has been established that the Corinthians understood Paul to be weak and unattractive. His weakness, lack of eloquence, ordinariness, fragility, suffering and hardships, formed a stark contrast with the unparalleled glory and power of the “treasure” he carried. But while Paul’s application of the image may have seemed outlandish, the image itself would have been familiar to Paul’s audience. Cheap, fragile, often unattractive, and readily discarded, clay jars were part of every-day life. Once again Paul gave a startling picture of what apostolic ministry was like, an image that reinforced the concept that both suffering and divine power were integral parts of his ministry.

The second part of 4:7 forms a purpose clause: “so that the extraordinary power might be of God and not originate with us” (ἵνα ἡ ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως ἦ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ μη ἐξ ἡμῶν). The inclusion of the words “to show that”, or something similar, in most standard translations reveals the assumption that the power for ministry inherently comes from God; the fact that the “treasure” – whether that is understood as a reference to the “light” of the gospel, the “ministry” of the gospel, or the gospel itself – is contained in the clay jars of fragile, weak human lives, simply demonstrates that. However, as has been stated, the Greek does not specifically have “to show that”; rather it has “so that the extraordinary power might be of God, and not of us” (cf. NAB, NJB) – a present tense subjunctive (ἵνα) of
the verb “to be” (eivmi). If Paul had wished to say “to show that” it is God’s power, there are several verbs he could have used (e.g. φανερῶ, φαίνω or εἴρηκοι), but he chose not to. It has been argued that Paul should be understood to mean exactly what he said, thus opening up an alternative interpretation. This interpretation raises the possibility that ministry could be attempted with human effort, in human power. But the reason the treasure is in “clay jars” is so that this will not be the case. If understood in this manner, then the logical conclusion is that the weakness and fragility of the clay jar of a human life is so that the minister will give up any illusion of self-sufficiency and realise that ministry can only be carried out in God’s power. Sufficiency must come from God (3:6), and the minister must rely on “the God who raises the dead” (1:9). The need for dependency on God, so dramatically demonstrated by Paul’s near-death experience in Asia, is once again unmistakably reaffirmed by this unexpected image of treasure in clay jars.

2 Corinthians 6:3-10

In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul described his ministry as a “ministry of reconciliation”. This ministry was possible only because it was through Christ’s death and resurrection that God had acted to reconcile the world to himself. This is yet another passage that reveals that not only was it Paul’s message about Christ’s death and resurrection and the right relationship with God that is possible as a result, but also his manner of proclamation of that message, and indeed his whole way of life, that followed the same pattern.
As Paul commended himself to the Corinthians (6:3-10), he did so using a well-known genre, that of the “hardship catalogue”, but in doing so he did not draw attention to his own self-sufficiency in enduring hardship. Rather the “great endurance” (2 Cor 6:4b) he displayed was the result of functioning “in the Holy Spirit” and “in the power of God”, and was demonstrated in a genuine, authentic and loving relationship with the Corinthian Christians (6:6b-7a). Additionally, it has been argued that the antitheses he used to describe his ministry (6:8-10) reflect his paradigm that viewed apostolic ministry as reflecting both the suffering and death of Jesus and God’s power in raising him from the dead.

Examination of 2 Corinthians reveals that Paul considered that the hardships he endured did not disqualify him for ministry; rather they were evidence that his ministry was conducted in God’s power not his own. The basis for his belief was that it was in these hardships that he had learned to rely on God. Once again the conclusion can be drawn that the paradigm of divine power in the midst of human weakness, patterned on the death and resurrection of Jesus, was foundational for Paul’s understanding of ministry.

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

In 2 Cor 12.1-10 Paul brings his comments regarding weakness to a climax. In chapters ten and eleven he had addressed various accusations and inferences that he was “weak”, and thus at least an inferior apostle – if indeed he was an apostle at all. His manner of dealing with these issues was to do what the Corinthians thought he should do, that is, to boast of his qualifications, even though such boasting was, he said, foolishness (11:1, 21; 12:11). However, instead of boasting
of his power and eloquence, he boasted of his weaknesses, including his persecutions (11:23-33; 12:9-10).

In 12:1-10 Paul dealt specifically with the matter of the relationship between ecstatic visions and qualification for apostolic ministry. He recounted an experience he had had fourteen years earlier, but even though it involved an exceptional revelation, he gave only minimal details about the experience, and revealed nothing at all of its actual content. Such an exceptional revelation could easily be the cause of enormous pride. In order to stop him from becoming proud, Paul was given a “thorn in the flesh” (12:7). Three times he pleaded with the Lord for it to be removed, but only when he received a categorically negative reply, did he realise its true purpose: to keep him from becoming proud because of the exceptional revelation he had received. Instead of the “thorn” being removed, it would remain as a constant reminder that not only such revelations, but also his apostolic ministry, were based on God’s grace, not on Paul’s worthiness.

While Paul was unprepared to share the “unutterable utterances” he heard when he was caught up to paradise (12:4), he openly shared the Lord’s reply to his request that the “thorn” be removed. The statement has been traditionally translated: “My grace is sufficient for you; for my power is made perfect in weakness”. However, a more literal translation is: “My grace is sufficient for you; for power is brought to an end in weakness” (καὶ ἐξήρθεν μοι ἁρκεῖ ὑπὸ ἡ χάρις μου, ἡ γὰρ δύναμις ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελεῖται). It was demonstrated earlier in this work that the combination of the history of interpreting ἡ δύναμις as a reference to the Lord’s power and the textual variation ἡ γὰρ δύναμις μου ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ
τελειοῦσαι has led to a perpetuation of the traditional translation. The majority of commentators follow the translation of the standard English versions without comment on any textual issues. Even though some more recent translations omit the “my” and a number of commentators acknowledge that it is not original, the statement is still frequently interpreted as if the “my” were there, that is, as if it were a reference to the Lord’s power. With regard to Paul’s choice of verb, most commentators, if they comment on it at all, argue that Paul used the verb τελέω (bring to an end, finish, complete) as if it was τελείω (complete, end, finish or make perfect). Exceptions to this are Lenski (1937, pp 1302-1306) and Dawn (2001, pp 37-41), who argue that the usual meaning of τελείω, (‘finished’/‘ended’) is the one that is intended here.

It has been shown that there is a significant overlap in meanings between the words τελέω and τελείω. However, with the possible exception of 2 Cor 12:9, the meaning of “to perfect” appears to be limited to τελείω. Thus, if 2 Cor 12:9 does indeed have the meaning of “made perfect”, it would appear that the verb τελέω has been used as if it were τελείω. Yet it is virtually impossible to find unequivocal examples of such usage, either in biblical or non-biblical literature.

The overwhelming evidence points to the standard meaning of τελέω being “ended, completed, finished”. There are some possible examples of τελέω being used as if it were τελείω, but these are far from certain. While a meaning of “perfected” cannot be completely ruled out, it is at best a rare usage. And as elsewhere Paul uses the verb τελείω and cognate words to express the idea of “made perfect”, it seems that his use of τελέω here was intentional. Therefore, the
The newcomers in Corinth presented the church with a model of apostleship that was very different from the model Paul presented. They advocated an apostleship that was strong, eloquent, boastful and forceful, and, as it fitted with their cultural expectations, this model of apostleship gained popularity among the Corinthians. By comparison, Paul’s model of apostleship was at best inferior, and possibly even invalid. It was in addressing this situation that Paul discussed his exceptional vision and subsequent “thorn in the flesh”, and then reported the Lord’s statement, “My grace is sufficient for you; for power is brought to an end in weakness.” The traditional interpretation has provided comfort for countless people over the centuries, and will no doubt continue to do so. Nevertheless, it is the conclusion of this thesis that the context indicated that Paul’s intention was
not to comfort people who were weak and suffering, but rather to challenge those who valued power. Thus this alternative interpretation is, I believe, more likely to express the apostle’s intentions in defending his apostleship in the face of accusations of weakness.

2 Corinthians 13:1-4

The theological underpinning for Paul’s understanding of weakness bringing human power to an end, and thus allowing divine power full freedom of operation, was the death and resurrection of Christ. This is made explicit in 2 Cor 13:3b-4:

He [Christ] is not weak in his dealings with you, but is powerful among you, for indeed he was crucified as a result of weakness, but lives as a result of God’s power. So we also in our dealings with you, share in his weakness, but we will live with him as a result of God’s power.

While it was only as he concluded the letter that Paul spelled this out, it was in fact the paradigm that underlay all he had said in the letter, in particular, his defence of his apostolic ministry. Some in the congregation in Corinth were looking for proof that Paul was a genuine apostle. That their existence as Christians was a result of Paul’s ministry should have been proof enough (3:1-3), and he had reminded them that “the signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works” (12:12). But if dealing with them with “the gentleness and meekness of Christ” (10:1) was not sufficient proof that he was a genuine apostle, then he would provide “proof” in the form of discipline.

Paul’s statement of his paradigm contains three interrelated statements that are very structured and include significant repetition, parallelism and contrasts, especially of the “weakness”/“power” antithesis. That Christ had not been
“weak” among the Corinthians had been demonstrated by their conversion, and
continued to be displayed among them. But the “power” of Christ’s resurrection
had been preceded by the “weakness” of his suffering and death. It is apparent
from this passage that Paul drew a parallel between his ministry among the
Corinthians and Christ’s death and resurrection. Both Paul and the Corinthians
were agreed that Paul was “weak”, but unlike the Corinthians who viewed such
“weakness” as a disqualifier for ministry, Paul viewed it as being one with
Christ’s “weakness”. And just as he shared in that weakness, so too would he also
share in God’s power in his dealings with the Corinthian congregation. It would
not be the human power of eloquent speech and forceful leadership that the
congregation admired in the newcomers to Corinth. Rather it would be divine
power that, if they did not change their ways, would be demonstrated in
discipline. Even this would be for their benefit, for as he had previously stated
(4:10-12), his sharing in the weakness and suffering of Christ not only meant that
he shared in Christ’s life, but that they, too, shared in that life. What he had
demonstrated in the way he interacted with them he now spelled out in theological
terms: valid ministry must reflect a sharing both in Christ’s suffering and death
and in God’s power in raising him from the dead.

The NT Apart from 2 Corinthians

It has been maintained that Paul’s paradigm for ministry, that is, the paradigm of
Christ’s death and resurrection, is present not only in 2 Corinthians, but is also
observable in Paul’s other writings. It is particularly noticeable in 1 Corinthians,
especially in the first four chapters, but the same principle can be discerned
elsewhere in the letter as well. It is also present in other letters of Paul; of particular note are Romans 8 and 15; Galatians 2 and 4; and Philippians 2-4.

While the paradigm is not as explicit in other NT writers, that ministry is to be conducted in God’s power rather than human power can be seen to be an underlying principle. Apart from the Pauline literature it is most noticeable in the accounts of Jesus’ sayings as recorded in the Gospels. Dependence on his Father was Jesus’ pattern of ministry, and consequently it is this pattern that Paul both expresses and lives out.

Summary of Findings

It is the conclusion of this thesis that the example of Christ “crucified as a result of weakness”, but living “as a result of God’s power”, was Paul’s model for Christian ministry. While the Corinthians acknowledged that sharing in Christ’s resurrection power was an indicator of apostolic ministry, they failed to recognise that resurrection power only came with the suffering and death on the cross. Sharing in Christ’s life was only possible when there was also a sharing in his death. Ministry, conducted through the clay jar of the life of a human minister, was always to be as the result of sufficiency that came from God, and in reliance on the “God who raises the dead”, because it was to be patterned on the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Both Paul’s theology and his practice were based on the paradigm of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Jesus was crucified as a result of weakness, but was raised by
God’s power. The pattern of Jesus was the pattern that Paul followed, and by extension, it is reasonable to conclude that it should also to be the pattern for all would be ministers of Christ. It is through weakness that Christ’s ministers are brought to a point of reliance on God, and then ministry can genuinely be carried out in the “extraordinary power” of God.

Where To From Here?

For the average pastor or lay leader, a search for Paul’s paradigm for ministry is little more than an interesting academic exercise unless a bridge can be built between the first century and the twenty-first century. It is the aim of this section to build at least some of the scaffolding for such a bridge. It can only be a scaffold and not a carefully constructed bridge for two reasons. Firstly, this is a topic which could be the subject of a work at least as long as this one already is; thus it is not possible to discuss it in detail here. It is only possible to raise some issues that could be the subject of further research. Secondly, the nature of the topic means that as soon as detailed instructions are formulated on how to apply Paul’s paradigm for ministry, the ministry is no longer one that relies on “God who raises the dead” (2 Cor 1:9), but becomes a ministry that relies on human instructions instead. Thus each minister must learn to rely on God as they work out what sharing both in Christ’s weakness and in the power of his resurrection means for their particular ministry, for it will be different for each person. It is hoped, however, that this brief discussion will stimulate the thinking so that ministers of the gospel of Christ can begin to wrestle with what functioning in God’s power rather than their own power means for them.
For many in the first century, the cross, and thus ministry that followed that pattern, was a stumbling-block and a scandal. It is, perhaps, the same for us, but over the centuries we have had a tendency to sanitise the cross, and thus down-play the scandal of the cross. We have made the cross the subject of art, jewellery and architecture, and to a large extent have forgotten the horror and revulsion of such suffering and degradation.

In the Western world, at least, we have a tendency to see “scandal” not so much in the cross itself, but in leadership that follows the pattern of cross: leadership that displays human weakness, human limitation, human suffering and human fragility, but functions in God’s power. Somewhere along the line, we seem to have fallen into the same trap that the Corinthian church did: we have come to value power, control and success. As Shoemaker (1989, p 408) comments: “The super-apostles are with us today promoting a religion of super-pastors, super-Christians and super-churches.” We have developed a theology of health and wealth, of professionalism and success that reflects the values of our culture. We have turned to the secular wisdom of our society to discover a pragmatic solution to church leadership. And while the insights of our society are not all mistaken, they are not always congruent with what either Jesus or Paul taught and modelled. A religion that looks to the wisdom of its culture for answers is, in Paul’s terms, a “different gospel” about “another Jesus” (2 Cor 11:4), for it has forgotten that the cross is the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:18-25). The challenge that faces us – whether we realise it or not – is: How can we rediscover the power and the wisdom of God that are revealed in the cross?
Possibilities for Bridging the Gap between the First Century and the Twenty-First Century

The advice of much that is written on the topic of church leadership calls for leaders to gain the best training they can, to discover their gifts, to work from their strengths, to research their target audience and tailor the approach to fit, to plan ahead, to have a vision for the future and communicate that vision to the congregation, and so on. There can be value in these strategies. Paul does teach that believers have been given spiritual gifts for the benefit of the whole church (e.g. 1 Cor 12-14), and the parable of the talents recorded in the Gospels (Matt 25:14-18; Luke 19:11-27) makes the point that the talents received should be used. Paul’s example and the argument he expressed in 2 Corinthians indicate that as much as we are called to use our gifts, talents, training and intelligence, Christian ministry and Christian leadership are to be more than that.

Beerens (1980, p 26) makes the provocative statement:

In the established church, one leads out of skills and natural abilities and natural gifts. Such things alone do not establish leadership and authority. Our ability to be suffering servants is a testimony to renewal, to renewed and redeemed leadership.

The assertion that skills, gifting and training on their own are insufficient for Christian leadership, that such leadership requires one to be a “suffering servant”, is one that tends to be uncomfortable for us. It was also uncomfortable for the Corinthian congregation, but it is congruent with Paul’s paradigm for ministry based on sharing both in Christ’s suffering and in the power of his resurrection (2 Cor 13:4).
Paul had an enviable heritage (Rom 11:1; 2 Cor 11:22), a good education and a zeal for God (Acts 22:3), but those are not the things of which he boasted nor the things in which he placed his confidence. To the disgruntlement of many in Corinth, the things of which he boasted were his weaknesses, suffering, hardships, and persecution – the things that forced him to rely on God. Perhaps there is something here for the leader in the twenty-first century to learn. As important as good training and good strategies might be, they are no substitute for reliance on God. If this was the case for Paul, then surely the same would hold true for ministers of Christ today.

The accusations of being “weak” that the Corinthians levelled at Paul have been touched upon a number of times in this work. And it has been pointed out that Paul did not deny his weaknesses, did not try to hide them. He was open and honest about the weaknesses, suffering, hardship and opposition he faced, but he was adamant that in no way did these things make him an inferior apostle or invalidate his ministry. On the contrary, they were the proof that his ministry was genuine. It was in the midst of, and even because of, such weakness that God’s power dwelt in him, because it was these weaknesses that forced him to rely on God (2 Cor 12:9-10).

Paul’s example of being open and honest about his weaknesses is one that leaders in the church today struggle to follow. A culture has developed of “having it all together”. Sometimes this is given a religious veneer: to show you are weak means you are “not trusting God”. And sometimes it is given a more secular veneer: to show you are weak means you are “not professional”. Whatever
rationalisation occurs, there are a number of negative outworkings of this type of attitude. Firstly, people can get the idea that the minister does actually “have it all together”. As a result, it is the minister rather than God who is praised. Or people can come to the conclusion that they could never live up to that standard, so the church is not for them. Secondly, ministers can come to believe that their success is their own doing. In the process they can forget to rely on God. Alternatively, the incongruity between their inner spiritual life and the façade they present to the church can tear them apart, leading to burnout and leaving the ministry. Many in the church – and not just the ministers – have learned to “fake good”, to use Dodd’s term (2003, p 86), without realising how destructive that can be:

Unfortunately, so many churches and Christian leaders today are afraid of people who appear weak. They maintain a myth of perfectionism and “fake good” for one another, never seeing how their pretension destroys the grace and life that could come through the body of Christ if they were only real and humble with each other.

Perhaps following Paul’s example about being honest about weakness would help to avoid some of these negative outcomes. Perhaps if ministers were more open about their weaknesses, it would give others the opportunity not only to admit their weaknesses, but also to learn to rely on God in the midst of those weaknesses. Perhaps if ministers could learn to live out Christ’s death and resurrection as Paul did, God’s power would be demonstrated in their ministry and Christ’s life would be brought to others. This cuts across much conventional wisdom and is a difficult step to take, for it makes the leader vulnerable – a position human beings tend not to be comfortable with. As Beerens (1980, p 25) comments:
It is difficult to believe that the unveiling of personal weakness will be life-giving, but that is one of the things that makes us approachable and accountable and credible as servant leaders. The faith necessary for such vulnerability is based squarely on the resurrection of Jesus Christ and nothing else.

As Paul repeated in numerous different ways in 2 Corinthians, such servant leadership is only possible if the minister relies on God. And it is the weaknesses endured – whatever those weaknesses might be – that bring a person to the realisation that dependence on God is the only option. Dodd (2003, pp 32-33) comes to the following conclusion:

We need leaders who model how to submit to God and receive God’s strength and cleansing for service in the world. It is exciting to feel strong, competent and in charge, but there is no true spiritual power in this, no ability to materialize God’s kingdom reality. Life-giving leadership flows from a deep dependency on the One who empowers, cleanses, guides and gives life.

This parallels Paul’s statements:

Indeed we felt that we had received a sentence of death. This was so that we might not rely on ourselves, but rely on God who raises the dead (2 Cor 1:9).

Such is our confidence through Christ toward God, not that we claim to be competent of ourselves. Rather, our competence comes from God who made us competent servants of the new covenant (2 Cor 3:4-6a).

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that this extraordinary power might be of God, and not originate with us (2 Cor 4:7).

We are always carrying around in our body the dying of Jesus, so that also in our body the life of Jesus might be revealed. For while we live, we are constantly being handed over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that Jesus’ life might also be revealed in our mortal body. So death is at work in us, but life in you (2 Cor 4:10-12).

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you; for power is brought to an end in weakness.” Therefore I will all the more gladly boast in my weaknesses so that Christ’s power will take up residence in me. Therefore I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in distress, in persecution and difficulties for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor 12:9-10).
While we might accept this intellectually, it is difficult to embrace it in life and ministry. Our natural inclinations, as well as everything our society has taught us, point in the opposite direction. And yet this study of 2 Corinthians makes it difficult to draw any other conclusion than this: what Paul taught and lived, not to mention what Jesus taught and lived, say this is the way to experience God’s power in ministry.

Paul’s paradigm for advanced Christian leadership is not being boss but serving as a slave. Spirit-led leadership is not about towering in power over others but about stooping low in submitted service (Dodd, 2003, p 140).

Nouwen (1989, pp 62-62) makes a similar statement:

The way of the Christian leader is not the way of upward mobility in which our world has invested so much, but the way of downward mobility ending on the cross. … Here we touch the most important quality of Christian leadership in the future. It is not a leadership of power and control, but a leadership of powerlessness and humility in which the suffering servant of God, Jesus Christ, is made manifest.

To be a servant leader was not easy for Paul. It resulted in much suffering and hardship. The same will almost certainly be true for us if we choose to follow Paul’s – and Jesus’ – paradigm for ministry. This is not the easy way, but Paul demonstrated that it is the way to effective ministry in God’s power. But this is not simply another strategy to add to the already long list of strategies for “effective ministry”. This is a radically different way of life. As Beerens (1980, pp 27-28) notes:

Often we take on the role of being a servant for awhile as a strategy to be able to lead. … We must view servanthood as becoming part of our nature through the continual work of the cross in our lives. … Our servant nature must become an indelible part of our character, not something assumed and not something that can easily be taken away, because it has become deeply ingrained in our character. That, I believe, was the depth of servanthood that Jesus meant.

Servant leadership in reliance on God means vulnerability, openness and honesty. It means that there must be a congruency between the message proclaimed and the
way of life of the messenger. Like Paul, we are called to come in weakness and to
proclaim “Jesus Christ, and him crucified”, so that “faith might rest not on human
wisdom but on the power of God” (1 Cor 2:2-5). We are not only called to
proclaim the message of Christ crucified and raised, we are also called to live it.

To come to Christ is to come to the crucified and risen One. The life-giving
apostle embodies in himself the crucifixion of Jesus in the sufferings and
struggles he endures as he is faithful and obedient to his Lord. So Paul
preaches the crucified and risen Jesus, and he embodies the dying of Jesus in
his struggles to further point to the Saviour. His message is about the cross
and his life is cruciform, shaped to look like the cross (Dodd, 2003, p 70).

This is not a popular approach to ministry. The plethora of books on Christian
leadership that take a different approach clearly demonstrate this. And yet it has
been demonstrated in this work that this is the approach that Paul both taught and
modelled: ministry in dependence on God and following the pattern of the death
and resurrection of Jesus. There are, however, a number of voices today that are
calling for an approach to ministry that follows Paul’s and Jesus’ pattern,¹ that is,
the pattern of the cross as the way not to “success” in the world’s terms, but the
only way to life-giving ministry in the power of God.

No crucified life, no cruciform existence, no life-giving ministry (Dodd,
2003, p 67).

Conclusion

It has been argued that Paul’s writings, in particular 2 Corinthians, demonstrate
that Paul’s paradigm for ministry was one of dependence on God. It was not in
his strengths and achievements that God’s power was demonstrated. Rather, it

¹ Those quoted here are just some of those who are calling for this kind of radical approach to
ministry in the twenty-first century.
was in his weaknesses, when he abandoned self-reliance and learned in the midst of extremity to rely on God, that his ministry was truly in God’s power. This was Paul’s paradigm because it followed the pattern of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Thus we discover that in essence Paul’s paradigm was the paradigm of the cross.

This is the challenge for ministers in the twenty-first century: to learn what it means to follow Paul’s paradigm, to follow the way of the cross. Circumstances today are very different from the circumstances that Paul faced. It is not possible to do a “direct transfer”. Rather, it is necessary to learn how to apply the same paradigm that Paul used in the first century to the twenty-first century so that we can say with Paul:

He [Christ] is not weak in his dealings with you, but is powerful among you, for indeed he was crucified as a result of weakness, but lives as a result of God’s power. So we also in our dealings with you share in his weakness, but we will live with him as a result of God’s power (2 Cor 13:3b-4).

As Henri Nouwen looked forward to the beginning of the twenty-first century, he made a remarkable and challenging statement. It is fitting to conclude both this brief reflection on how a bridge might be constructed between the first century and the twenty-first, on how Paul’s paradigm for ministry based on the death and resurrection of Jesus might be applied today, as well as this study as a whole, with his statement:

I leave you with the image of the leader with outstretched hands, who chooses a life of downward mobility. It is the image of the praying leader, the vulnerable leader, and the trusting leader. May that image fill your hearts with hope, courage, and confidence as you anticipate the next century (Nouwen, 1989, p 73).
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