

Paul's Emotions in 2 Corinthians

Part 2: Chapters 8-13

—Stephen Voorwinde—

Stephen Voorwinde is Adjunct Lecturer in New Testament at the Reformed Theological College in Geelong, Victoria

Introduction

In the previous article on Paul's emotions in 2 Corinthians¹ it was noted that in chapters 1-7 his emotions are not scattered randomly but follow a well-defined pattern. Not only do they tend to cluster around references to the severe letter, they are also expressive of the larger theological themes that Paul is developing. In the first half of the epistle Paul's argument was driven by paradoxes. These paradoxes all cohered in the overarching life-through-death paradox which defined Paul's new covenant ministry. The paradoxes provided a matrix in which Paul's emotions could convincingly be understood. This pattern continues in chapters 8-13.

Chapters 8-9

These chapters concern the collection of funds for the relief of the church at Jerusalem. Buoyed by the good news Paul had received from Titus that the "severe letter" had been well received and had led to repentance, the apostle is able to turn his attention to the delicate subject of finances. On the basis of a restored relationship with the Corinthian church he can now confidently appeal to them to do their part in contributing to the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem.² This project had already been launched the previous year (1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8:10; 9:2), but the Corinthians' enthusiasm for it had obviously flagged as their relationship with Paul had deteriorated.

In an effort to renew their zeal Paul begins his appeal by reminding them of the generosity of the Macedonians. True to form Paul describes this generosity by way of a paradox – "their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality" (8:2). Even more compelling is the paradoxical nature of the underlying generosity of Jesus himself: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (8:9).

8:7 Love

The key concept that drives Paul's appeal is that of "grace" (χάρις) which permeates these two chapters (8:1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 16, 19; 9:8, 14, 15). Nowhere else in Paul's correspondence is there such a concentration of references to "grace". They undergird his entire argument here in 2 Cor 8-9. The generosity of the Macedonians was inspired by the grace of God (8:1). Jesus' own generosity is an expression of his grace (8:9). The Jerusalem offering itself is a work of grace (8:6, 7). In his opening appeal to the Corinthians to rejoin the collection effort Paul again reminds them that they are participating in a work of grace: "But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the **love** we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work [lit. 'this grace'] also" (8:7).

At this point, in connection with the key concept of grace, Paul mentions love. However, because of textual variants, it is not clear whether this reference is to Paul's love or to that of the Corinthians. The words translated in the NASB as

¹ See Stephen Voorwinde, "Paul's Emotions in 2 Corinthians: Part 1(Chapters 1-7), *Vox Reformata* 80 (2015): 67-106.

² Cf. James W. Thompson, "Paul's Argument from *Pathos* in 2 Corinthians," in Thomas H. Olbricht and Jerry L. Sumney (eds.), *Paul and Pathos*, SBL Symposium Series 16 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 141: "The numerous connections between chapters 7 and 8 indicate that the dense associative language of chapter 7 lays the basis for the request in chapter 8. The declaration that Paul's boasting on their behalf did not result in shame anticipates Paul's request for the collection."

“the love we inspired in you” could be rendered more literally as “the love from us in you” (τῆ ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐν ὑμῖν ἀγάπη). The other main contender for being the authentic reading is “the love from you in us” (τῆ ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐν ἡμῖν ἀγάπη).³ So the question is whether Paul is referring to his love for the Corinthians or to their love for him. The textual problem is a serious one. As Harris has pointed out, “There is probably no textual problem in 2 Corinthians where the commentators and EVV are so evenly divided.”⁴ It is therefore a matter that deserves careful consideration.

The first reading (“the love from us in you”) is the only one with papyrus support. P⁴⁶ is one of the Chester Beatty papyri and is generally dated “about 200.”⁵ Further strong support comes from the fourth century Codex Vaticanus (B) and the Church Fathers, Origen, Ambrosiaster and Augustine. There is also support from Coptic, Latin and Syriac manuscripts.

The strongest support for the second reading (“the love from you in us”) comes from the fourth century Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲛ) and from later uncial manuscripts. Some important minuscule manuscripts also favour this reading, as do some Latin manuscripts⁶ and the Byzantine Lectionaries.

The external textual evidence would therefore seem to tilt somewhat in the direction of the first reading. It has earlier and generally superior manuscript support. The major evidence for this reading comes from the Western and Alexandrian traditions, which is usually seen as a strong combination.

The first reading would also appear to be the more difficult reading. It is the one which a scribe would have been more likely to correct. Within v. 7 the transition from the Corinthians’ faith, utterance, knowledge and earnestness to Paul’s love for them might seem abrupt. Moreover, in v. 8 Paul goes on to speak of “the sincerity of your love.” So the immediate context might suggest to a scribe that the Corinthians’ love for Paul is in view.

Given the existence of textual variants, we might also consider whether the wider context lends support to one reading or the other. The harder reading scholars normally favour is almost by definition the one that is less likely in the immediate context. However, in the broader context of the epistle as a whole, there is a strong emphasis on Paul’s love for the Corinthians (2:4; 6:6; 11:11; 12:15). Never does he speak explicitly of their love for him (although in 6:12 he had written that they were “restrained in their affection” for him). This emphasis lends broader contextual support to the more difficult reading in this case.

For the purposes of this discussion the first reading will therefore be regarded as genuine. It has slightly stronger external support from the ancient manuscripts. To a scribe it would have been the more difficult reading and thus more likely to have been corrected. It also seems to accord with an emphasis that permeates the letter as whole.⁷

Once the textual issue has been decided, there is still a further problem. What precisely does Paul mean by the problematic and puzzling expression “the love from us in you”? The English translations offer several possibilities:

- “our love for you” (ESV, Holman footnote, NIV footnote)
- “the love we have for you” (NEB footnote)

³ The other readings are τῆ ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐν ὑμῖν ἀγάπη (“the love from you in you”) and τῆ ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐν ἡμῖν ἀγάπη (“the love from us in us”). These renderings are probably intended to refer to the readers’ and writers’ mutual love respectively. What manuscript evidence there is for these variants, however, is late and sparse.

⁴ Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 573. The first reading is reflected in ESV, JB, NASB and NRSV, and the second in Holman, KJV, LB, NEB, NIV, NKJV, RSV, Phillips and TEV. Several of these translations have one reading in the main body of the text and the other in a marginal note or footnote. Interestingly, from the RSV to the NRSV and from the NIV to the NIV (2011) there is a shift from the second reading to the first.

⁵ UBS⁴, 8.

⁶ The Vulgate, for example, reads “charitate vestra in nos” (“your love toward us”).

⁷ Cf. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 512-13, “On the basis of the testimony of several early witnesses . . . a majority of the Committee felt a slight preference for the variant ἡμῶν ἐν ὑμῖν, because it is the more difficult reading. At the same time it must be acknowledged that the reading ὑμῶν ἐν ἡμῖν, which superficially is more appropriate in the context, had very wide circulation in the early church . . .”

- “the biggest share of our affection” (JB)
- “the love we inspired in you” (NASB)
- “the love which we have kindled in you / your hearts” (NIV, 2011 / NEB footnote).

From these suggestions the question becomes whether Paul is speaking of his love for the Corinthians pure and simple or whether he is speaking of a love that is somehow also reflected, or perhaps even reciprocated, by his readers. Perhaps it is significant that Paul does not speak here of his love *toward* the Corinthians (εἰς ὑμᾶς, as in 2:4) but of his love *in* them (ἐν ὑμῖν).⁸ So although the emphasis here and throughout the epistle is on Paul’s love for the Corinthians, it does not deny the reality of their love. However, as the next verse makes clear, the genuineness of that love is about to be tested. The collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem will serve as a litmus test for their sincerity. It will also demonstrate to what extent the grace of God is reflected in their lives.

This is actually the central thrust of Paul’s plea in v. 7. As they have been the recipients of God’s grace, they are now to be the channels of that grace. There is a certain parallelism between the two halves of the verse. Just as they abound in everything (faith, speech, knowledge, earnestness and Paul’s love for them), they should also abound in this grace, i.e. the grace of contributing generously to the collection effort. As God has been generous to them, they should now be generous to others.

God’s generosity to the Corinthians was demonstrated first of all in such *charismata* as faith, speech and knowledge.⁹ These gifts are expressions of God’s *charis* (grace). Paul had already made this clear at the beginning of 1 Corinthians, “I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and in all knowledge” (1 Cor 1:4-5). Paul elaborates on these gifts in his more detailed discussion of the *charismata* in 1 Corinthians 12-14 where speech and knowledge are linked to such word gifts as prophecy, teaching, tongues, the word of wisdom and the word of knowledge (1 Cor 12:8; 13:2, 8; 14:6, 9, 19). It is in this context that Paul also mentions the gift of faith (1 Cor 12:9), the kind of faith that can move mountains (1 Cor 13:2). When therefore in 2 Cor 8:7 Paul mentions faith in the same breath as speech and knowledge he is thinking not so much of saving faith as of the *charisma* of faith that undergirds such activities as healings and miracles (1 Cor 12:9, 10).¹⁰ The Corinthians abounded in this kind of faith.

More recently the Corinthians had also demonstrated that they abounded in earnestness. Their godly sorrow (or more literally their “sorrow according to God”) in response to the severe letter produced an earnestness to deal with the matter at hand (2 Cor 7:11, 12). In his discussion of the severe letter Paul clearly sees their response as a work of God. When, in the present context, it comes to the collection effort Paul detects the same kind of earnestness in the Macedonians (8:8) and Titus (8:16), an earnestness which was placed in them by God and which he no doubt hopes his readers will emulate. The Corinthians’ earnestness, no less than the *charismata* of faith, speech and knowledge, is therefore evidence of the abundant grace of God at work in their lives.

The last example of God’s generosity and grace to the Corinthians that Paul mentions is his own love for them. Not only do they abound in faith, speech, knowledge and earnestness but also “in the love from us in you.” The language is reminiscent of Paul’s earlier claim that “you might know the love which I have especially for you” (2:4).¹¹ This had been the first time Paul mentioned his love for the Corinthians in this epistle. Remarkably this love is what had motivated him to write the severe letter in the first place. So abundant was his love for them, and so concerned was he for the well-being of the Corinthian church, that he was prepared to cause them sorrow.¹² As he wrote the letter his love came to expression in his anguish of heart and many tears (2:4). His love for the Corinthians was indeed an abundant,

⁸ Cf. Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 574: “Paul is here referring to the Corinthians’ love for Christ and fellow believers that his proclamation of the gospel had generated in them.”

⁹ See Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 402-404.

¹⁰ See Hughes, *2 Corinthians*, 296; Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 574.

¹¹ Cf. ἀλλὰ τὴν ἀγάπην ἵνα γνῶτε ἦν ἔχω περισσοτέρως εἰς ὑμᾶς (2:4) and ἀλλ’ ὡς περ ἐν παντὶ περισσεύετε ... τῇ ἐξ ἡμῶν ἐν ὑμῖν ἀγάπῃ (8:7).

¹² Cf. Frederickson, “‘Through Many Tears’ (2 Cor 2:4),” 179, “According to ancient epistolary theory and practice, Paul’s grieving self-presentation conveyed strong moral rebuke and sought to instill grief in order to bring the readers to repentance. The letter had precisely this effect (2:4; 7:8-12).”

overflowing love. This love only grew stronger when he heard of the earnestness of their response to the demands of the severe letter (7:11, 12). In the present context he can therefore say without exaggeration that they “abound in the love from us in you.” Paul’s love for them that had been demonstrated in the previous letter had indeed been reciprocated by the way the Corinthians had responded to its uncompromising demands. In a real sense his love for them had been reflected in their response to his letter. Now he calls upon them to take the next step and respond generously to his appeal for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

A close examination of the verse in which it occurs therefore throws some helpful light on the obscure expression “the love from us in you,” an expression with which the ancient scribes clearly seem to have struggled, given the variants which have come down to us. The epistle as a whole suggests that Paul’s love for the Corinthians is primarily in view, but because of their generally positive response to the severe letter there is also a real sense in which they have reciprocated his love. He showed them his love in writing that letter, they reflected that love back to him by their response to it. So in a real sense he could say that his love was in them.

Chapters 10-13

New Pastoral Challenges

Because of either a recalcitrant minority or the arrival of intruders who are setting the church against its founding apostle, Paul senses an urgent need to defend his apostleship once again. This time he does so in strident and even sarcastic terms, an approach that he seems to be borrowing from Greek rhetoric.¹³ The change of tone is remarkable and seems to favour the view that a fresh outbreak of opposition has taken place. It would also seem that these chapters were written some time after the previous chapters. Paul’s plan to send Titus and another brother to Corinth to collect the offering (8:16-18) sounds as if it has already been carried out – and with less than favourable results (12:17-18). Although Paul has a strong sense of financial accountability, his critics turn this against him and accuse him of hypocrisy and deceit (12:14-18). These devious criticisms call for a vigorous defence of Paul’s apostolic integrity.

The identity of Paul’s opponents can only be determined from the epistle itself. It is possible that the earlier problems with the immoral man had not been as completely resolved as Paul seemed to believe in chapters 1-7. A minority in Corinth may still be recalcitrant and in opposition to Paul.¹⁴ Perhaps the relief he expressed in those chapters may have been premature. From 6:14-7:1 it might also be possible to conclude that some of the Corinthians were still visiting idol temples, a practice that Paul had strongly warned against in 1 Cor 10. Neither of these potentially remaining problems, however, sufficiently explains Paul’s change of tone and the kind of opponents he describes in 2 Cor 10-13. It is therefore probably best to describe the opposition in these chapters as a new development. Whatever remaining discontent there may have been with Paul in the Corinthian church, these new opponents seem to have been intruders.

¹³ See, for example, L. L. Welborn, “The Corinthian Correspondence,” in Mark Harding and Alanna Nobbs (eds.), *All Things to All Cultures: Paul among Jews, Greeks, and Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 236-37; Thomas H. Olbricht and Jerry L. Sumney (eds.), *Paul and Pathos*, SBL Symposium Series 16 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 127-79. For an opposing viewpoint see Paul Barnett, *Paul – A Pastor’s Heart in Second Corinthians* (Sydney: Aquila Press, 2012), 121-25. Barnett changed his mind on the issue, now no longer embracing the view he held when he wrote his commentary on 2 Corinthians (1997). Currently he holds that “Paul had very specific objectives in writing Second Corinthians and that the letter simply gives expression to Paul’s urgent practical concerns” (*Paul – A Pastor’s Heart*, 125).

¹⁴ This is the view defended by R. P. Martin, *New Testament Foundations* 2:179-80: “There are evidences in chapters 1-7 of the opposition to Paul which still persisted [1:17f.; 2:6; 2:17; 4:2-5; 5:12f.] . . . These evidences suffice to show that chapters 1-7 do not give the impression that the Corinthians are now *wholly* on the side of Paul. His relief is occasioned by the responses of the majority, which was a big step forward, but he must still deal with the more dangerous minority; and it is possible that Paul commends the majority in the first part of the letter, before turning his severe words of rebuke to the still recalcitrant minority in the closing chapters.” Thus also Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, third (revised) edition (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), 431, who further argues that in 2 Corinthians (as also in Philipians) Paul had intended from the start to reserve his strongest words of condemnation until the end. More unlikely is Guthrie’s final suggestion, “Or it may even be that he was suddenly possessed with misgivings about the genuineness of their change of attitude and decided to end on a firmer note.”

They may have appeared on the scene after Paul had written chapters 1-9, or at least Paul became aware of their presence and influence in Corinth after these chapters had been written.

This reconstruction of events assumes a time lapse between the composition of chapters 1-9 and chapters 10-13. Although Paul may have started writing the Corinthians as soon as he heard Titus' good report, the letter may have taken some time to complete. As Carson and Moo have explained:

. . . even if he set to writing (or dictating) immediately, there is no reason to think that he finished it promptly. This epistle is fairly long, and Paul was at this time extraordinarily pressed by his ministry in Macedonia. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the completion of the letter was delayed for weeks, or even longer . . . If during that time Paul received additional information about the situation in Corinth and learned that the church had once again plummeted into the disastrous state presupposed by 2 Corinthians 10-13, the abrupt change of tone that begins at 10:1 would be accounted for. In other words, one might reasonably postulate that after finishing chapters 1-9, but before completing the letter and sending it off, Paul received bad news from Corinth and changed his tack in the final chapters of his epistle.¹⁵

To appreciate Paul's change of tone in chapters 10-13, and particularly his overt expression of specific emotions in this section, it will also be helpful to have some understanding of the nature of the opposition that he is countering. Two questions need to be answered: (a) who were Paul's opponents in these chapters? and (b) what were their criticisms of Paul?

(a) Who were Paul's opponents in these chapters?

1. They were Jews (11:22). This does not necessarily mean that they were Judaizers as was the case in Galatia. Words such as *circumcision*, *law* and *commandment* are conspicuous by their absence anywhere in 2 Corinthians.¹⁶
2. They claimed to be Christians (10:7; 11:23).¹⁷
3. They commended themselves (10:12, 18).
4. They took an authoritarian stance and were guilty of "spiritual abuse" when it came to the Corinthian church (11:20).
5. They charged money for their services (11:12).
6. Paul exposes their sham by reminding his readers that these intruders were actually promoting another Jesus, a different spirit and a different gospel (11:4). He therefore calls them "false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ . . . who disguise themselves as servants of righteousness" (11:13, 15).
7. Sarcastically he refers to them as "super-apostles" (11:5, 12:11).

¹⁵ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, second edition (Leicester: Apollos, 2005), 434; cf. Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos*, 207, "Paul was dictating this epistle over a period of time, as often occurred in ancient letter writing. When he began it, he had not yet heard of the Judaizers' arrival in Corinth. But at some point along the way, fresh reports alerted him to the problem so that he shifted gears and moved in an unanticipated direction in chapters 10-13, resorting to severer rebukes than he had expected to use when he began dictating." Slightly less likely, according to Blomberg, is the possibility that chapters 10-13 form the body of a letter that Paul wrote after chapters 1-9.

¹⁶ Cf. Barnett, *The Corinthian Question*, 163-64, "It is wrong to call them 'Judaizers' as if they were attempting some kind of reverse conversion of the Corinthian Gentiles from their Christianity to Judaism . . . The complete absence of any reference to circumcision in 2 Corinthians is noteworthy and suggests it was not an issue in Corinth when Paul wrote this letter."

¹⁷ Barnett, *The Corinthian Question*, 163, has described them as "*Jews, Jerusalem Jews, Greek-speaking Jews, Pharisaic Jews – who were Christian*" (italics his), but this more detailed description depends on a reconstruction that goes beyond the available evidence.

8. They seem to have been taken in by the Hellenistic flair for the spectacular and for brilliant performance. This also appears to be the basis for some of their criticisms of Paul.

(b) What were their criticisms of Paul?

1. He was meek when present with the Corinthians but bold when absent (10:1). A little later Paul quotes their criticism verbatim. It is quite stinging: “His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive, and his speech contemptible” (10:10).
2. They regard Paul and his companions as if they “walked according to the flesh” (10:2). This could be a reference to what they considered to be his poor speaking abilities (10:1, 10). If he were truly spiritual he would be a better speaker.
3. They were critical of the fact that, unlike themselves, Paul preached the gospel to the Corinthians without charge (11:7). Paul counters by saying that he will not change his mind on this issue. He will maintain his usual practice of not charging for his services in order to cut the ground from under his opponents (11:12).
4. The previous criticism did not stand alone, however. It becomes nastier and more conniving when they accuse Paul of craftiness. He did not need the Corinthians’ financial support because the proceeds for the Jerusalem offering will end up in his own pocket (12:16-18). He did not burden them directly, but took advantage of the Corinthians through Titus and the other brother who were responsible for the collection. This could be a reference to the visit that Titus and two other brothers were responsible for in 8:16-24. The tense of the verbs in 8:17, 18, 22 (it could be taken as an epistolary aorist¹⁸) makes it possible for that visit to have already been made or yet to be made. If in chapter 8 the visit had already been made, then it was most likely the visit which Titus reported on in chapter 7. (This would appear to be the best possible solution if all of 2 Corinthians was written at the one time.) If, on the other hand, as appears more likely from the context, that visit still had to be made, then there is a time lapse between chapters 8-9 and chapters 10-13. The criticism by Paul’s opponents in 12:16-18 could be made only after the visit of Titus and the other brother(s).
5. Paul’s opponents accuse him of not loving the Corinthians (11:11), presumably for not charging them for his services (see 11:9; cf. Phil. 4:15; Acts 18:5).
6. Paul was a nobody and inferior to the “super-apostles” (12:11).
7. The Corinthians should have commended Paul and defended him against these charges, but did not (12:11). This forced him to have to resort to the “fool’s speech” (11:1-12:13) in which he boasts about his weaknesses. This contravenes his normal practice which is to follow the principle laid down in Jer. 9:23-24: “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord” (1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17). It seems that desperate times call for desperate measures.

In sum, these “superlative apostles” (11:5) have cut themselves off from the message of the cross of Jesus by their over-emphasis on power and brilliant performance (13:4). They appear to emphasise the resurrection of Jesus to the neglect of his crucifixion. Paul seeks to redress this imbalance and comes back to the cross side of the gospel in a sustained argument for weakness as strength. The paradoxical and ironic nature of Paul’s response to his opponents has been well captured in the comments by L. L. Welborn:

Throughout the “fool’s speech,” Paul undermines the values of his critics and the norms of his rivals by ironic treatment of the materials of the genre: his accomplishments are calamities (11:23-29); his

¹⁸ This is a grammatical device in Greek letter writing whereby the writer can refer to an event as past which has not yet occurred. It is done out of courtesy for the readers for whom the event will be past by the time they read the letter. Hughes, *2 Corinthians*, 468, argues that in 12:17-18 (which refers to the visit of Titus and the brother Paul sent with him) the aorists are genuine aorists, but that in 8:17, 18, 22 (which refers to the visit by Titus and two other brothers) the aorists are epistolary or anticipatory. If this understanding is correct, Paul sent Titus to Corinth on financial business on two separate occasions – an earlier visit with one companion and a later visit with two. The larger, second delegation could suggest that Paul is taking greater precautions.

revelations are unutterable (12:1-4); his healing is inefficacious (12:7-9); his power consists in weakness (12:5, 9-10) . . . As an ironic defense of the legitimacy of his apostleship, Paul's "foolish discourse" must be judged a complete success.¹⁹

Although the weakness as strength paradox comes to its most poignant expression in the "fool's speech" in 11:1-12:13, it dominates all of chapters 10-13. As this speech forms the central passage in this section, this paradox drives Paul's entire argument. Moreover, as with the other paradoxes in 2 Corinthians, it coheres closely with the death and life paradox that undergirds and embraces all the paradoxes.²⁰ Thus, even though in the church at Corinth there are now new challenges to Paul's apostleship and fresh outbreaks of opposition to his ministry, he continues to develop his major theme and uses the same line of argument. The paradoxes of his apostleship are anchored firmly in the central gospel paradox of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

11:2-3 Jealousy and Fear

I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness; but indeed you are bearing with me.

² *For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.*

³ *But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.*

In v. 2 the English translation tradition is virtually unanimous in identifying Paul's emotion as jealousy. A rare exception is the once popular LB, which is not so much a translation as a paraphrase, "I am anxious for you with the deep concern of God himself." Ironically the Greek lexicons also take exception to the EVV, albeit in different ways. BDAG, like BAGD before it, defines ζήλος in this verse as "intense positive interest in someth., *zeal, ardour*, marked by a sense of dedication."²¹ Likewise, the cognate verb ζηλώω, which is also used here, is defined as "be positively and intensely interested in someth., *strive, desire, exert oneself earnestly, be dedicated*."²² In both cases this more positive meaning is explicitly contrasted to such negative feelings as jealousy or envy. Similarly, Abbott-Smith makes a distinction between "jealousy" and "zeal" when it comes to the noun, and between "to burn with envy or jealousy, to be jealous" and "to seek or desire earnestly" when it comes to the verb.²³ In both cases he places 2 Cor 11:2 in the second category. *EDNT* is no different: "According to 2 Cor 11:2 Paul is the father of the bride who is *eager* . . . to present the Church as a pure bride to Christ . . . Inasmuch as Paul is not watchful in his own interest, one may speak indirectly, if at all, of 'jealousy'; preferably: 'I watch over your exclusive relationship to Christ as would be appropriate for God himself.'"²⁴

The reader who is seeking to identify Paul's emotion in this verse with any degree of precision is therefore caught on the horns of a dilemma. English Bible translations favour jealousy, while the lexicons oppose this choice, opting rather for such emotions as zeal, ardour and eagerness. What is the way out of this semantic impasse?

Firstly, it is important to remember that ζήλος and its cognates in the NT occupy a semantic field almost identical in extent to that of the נָפַח word group in the OT. In the Hebrew the noun means "ardour, zeal, jealousy," the verb "to be

¹⁹ Welborn, "The Corinthian Correspondence," 237.

²⁰ For a more detailed description of the relationship of the other paradoxes to this central paradox see my earlier article, "Paul's Emotions in 2 Corinthians: Part 1 (Chapters 1-7)," 74-75.

²¹ BDAG, 427.

²² BDAG, 427.

²³ G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1937; repr. 1973), 195.

²⁴ *EDNT* 2:100. In the papyri the noun is found in a couple of "passages which support 'fervour' rather than 'emulation' as the primary idea of the word" (MM, 273).

jealous, zealous,” and the adjectives “jealous”.²⁵ Much the same range of meaning is apparent in their Greek counterparts in the LXX and the NT.²⁶ Moreover, of the 85 occurrences of the נָפַד word group in the OT almost half (42) are used with reference to God. With God as their referent these terms often have strongly covenantal overtones. While it is out of love that God enters into a covenant relationship with his people (Deut 7:6-13; Jer 31:1-3; Hos 11:1-4), his jealousy or zeal arises from the intensity and exclusiveness of the covenant bond (Exod 20:4-6; 34:12-16; Num 25:11; Deut 4:23, 24). Not surprisingly, therefore, this covenant relationship can be described under the illustration of marriage (Isa 54:5, 6; 62:5; Jer 3:1; Ezek 16:23-33; Hos 2:16-20).²⁷ Yahweh is the bridegroom and Israel his bride. As the divine husband he is understandably jealous when his covenant partner engages in idolatry and worships other gods (Exod 20:5; 34:14; Deut 5:9; 6:14, 15; 29:20; 32:16, 21; Psa 78:58; Ezek 8:3, 5; 16:38, 42; Zech 1:14; 8:2; cf. Num 5:11-31; Prov 6:34; Cant 8:6).²⁸ So often is this the case that Yahweh can aptly describe himself as “a jealous God” (Exod 20:5; 34:14; Deut 5:9).

Secondly, we need to explore the background to the metaphor that Paul uses in the second half of v. 2: *for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin*. Scholars are generally agreed that this illustration comes from Jewish rather than Graeco-Roman wedding customs, but even within a Jewish setting more than one possibility presents itself. David Williams, for example, has noted that among the Jews marriage involved two steps – the betrothal and the wedding. The period of betrothal usually lasted a year, during which the woman was considered to be the man’s wife. Throughout this important time in the couple’s relationship there were also some significant others who had a stake in their courtship. As Williams further explains:

Two men played an important part in the formation of a Jewish marriage. One, known as “**the friend of the bridegroom,**” took the groom’s part, and the other represented the bride. They had a number of duties. They acted as liaisons between the bride and groom. To all intents and purposes, the representatives conducted the couple’s wooing, and when the matter was settled, it was the “friends” who arranged the wedding and sent out the invitations. The “**friend of the bride**” had a particular duty to which Paul refers in this passage: he must ensure that the bride came to her wedding as a *virgo intacta*. Paul saw himself, vis-à-vis the Corinthians, in the role of the friend. He had wooed and won them for Christ. He had “betrothed” them to Christ, and now he was bound (so he felt) to present them as “a pure virgin” to their prospective “husband.”²⁹

Attractive as this proposal may be, not all are agreed that it provides the most accurate background to Paul’s illustration. Barnett, for example, has argued that Paul is here casting himself in the role of the father of the bride:

Critical to this verse and the next is the apostle’s portrayal of his ministry by the metaphor of betrothal, a practice alien to modern Western culture. It is, in all probability, a paternal image whereby a father pledges a daughter in marriage to a prospective husband, taking responsibility for her virginal fidelity to her betrothed in the period between the betrothal and the marriage. The apostle’s pride in his people “on the

²⁵ BDB, 888.

²⁶ With only one exception the LXX consistently translates the נָפַד family by the ζήλ- word group in Hellenistic Greek.

²⁷ Gianfranco Ravasi, “Towards a Biblical Theology of Emotions” (a paper delivered at the ESSAT (Science and Theology) Conference, Perugia/Assisi, 2 May, 2014), 21, explains the relationship between jealousy and love as follows: “Jealousy expresses the unbreakable bond that binds two people, a bond wounded by betrayal. In this light the extensive use of jealousy in the Bible as a theological category against idolatry is explained, to such an extent as to make it the mantle of God (Isa 59:17) ... Precisely because of its connection to nuptial symbolism, jealousy reveals itself as another face of tenderness, the strong and passionate emotion that God feels for his creature and, as happens in many divine biblical definitions, this jealousy is not only the principle of reactions to rejection but is a source of infinite love.” Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that divine jealousy is an expression of God’s covenant love.

²⁸ Cf. *TDNT* 2:879 (under the heading “Zeal in the OT and Judaism”): “When the reference is to Yahweh, it is almost always a question of His relations to His people Israel. Yahweh’s zeal is provoked when Israel worships idols and thus transgresses the commandment which has its basis in Ex. 20:5 ... Following Hosea, Ezekiel describes this apostasy as adultery, and in him ζήλος can thus mean jealousy in the special sense of marital jealousy (Ex. 16:38; 23:25; cf. 5:13);” also *NIDNTT* 3:1167: “The exclusiveness of Yahweh’s relationship to Israel is shown also by his showing *zēlos*, i.e. jealousy, at her unfaithfulness, which is often presented as adultery (Ezek. 16:38; 23:27).”

²⁹ Williams, *Paul’s Metaphors*, 54 (emphases his).

day of the Lord Jesus” (1:14) is consistent with the marriage imagery used here whereby a father would finally present his betrothed daughter with pride to her husband on the long-awaited wedding day.³⁰

On the basis of the available evidence it is difficult to decide whether in the use of the betrothal illustration Paul intends his readers to see him as the father of the bride or as the friend of the bride/groom. One point is clear, however. Paul does *not* present himself as the bridegroom or husband, but casts himself in a subservient role. Nevertheless, the emotion he experiences is one that we would expect of the bridegroom or husband. No doubt this is because he takes his apostolic responsibility for the church at Corinth with the utmost seriousness. But the language used here suggests that even more is at stake. Quite literally he is saying, “I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God.”³¹ It is a remarkable turn of phrase. He is claiming that the emotion felt by God when Israel worshipped other gods in the OT is the very emotion that he is now experiencing when the Corinthians are accepting another Jesus, a different spirit and a different gospel (v. 4). They are at risk of committing the kind of spiritual adultery that God’s covenant people were guilty of time and again in the OT. In the strongest possible terms he is therefore calling them back to covenant faithfulness so that he “might present them to Christ as a pure virgin” (v. 2). As he does so, his emotions are deeply stirred.

A stark OT parallel to Paul’s jealousy is that displayed by Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest, when the Israelites joined with the Moabites in the worship of Baal of Peor, an incident to which Paul had already referred in 1 Cor 10:8. Of Phinehas the Lord had said that “he was jealous with my jealousy among them” (Num 25:11; cf. 25:13). It is language that Paul seems to be echoing here as he claims that God’s jealousy has become his own.³² If Paul is indeed alluding again to the incident of Baal-Peor, he is recalling the drastic action taken by Phinehas who with his spear killed an adulterous Israelite and the Midianite woman he had taken into his tent (Num 25:7, 8). A more extreme parallel would be difficult to imagine, but it does serve to highlight the intensity of Paul’s feelings at this point. The jealousy of God that drove Phinehas is now driving Paul.³³ The Corinthians had better take note!

Despite the parallels there is of course still one major difference between the Corinthians and unfaithful, idolatrous Israel. The Corinthians have not yet committed spiritual adultery, but by being hospitable to the interlopers they are running a huge risk. In being receptive to the different gospel of Paul’s opponents they are placing themselves in a situation of great spiritual danger. This becomes clear as Paul continues in v. 3, *But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.* Paul’s feelings are mixed. He is driven not only by divine jealousy but also by the very human fear that the Corinthians might yet prove unfaithful. It is an emotion that will surface again in 12:20-21. The present state of the church fills Paul with both jealousy and anxiety. His emotions are not simple, but complex. Behind Paul’s jealousy lies his fear. His fear is in fact the ground for his jealousy. Paradoxically, his very human fear arouses in him a divine jealousy. Being an apostle does have its psychological complexities!

³⁰ Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 498-99. According to Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 736, when it comes to Paul’s role in the betrothal of the Corinthian church to Christ, four suggestions have been made: (a) the friend of the groom or the groomsman, (b) the friend of the bride, (c) the Father’s agent, and (d) the father of the bride. Like Barnett, Harris opts for the last alternative.

³¹ In the phrase θεοῦ ζηλω the genitive can be understood as either a genitive of source (“a jealousy from God”), a descriptive genitive (“a divine jealousy”), a possessive genitive (“God’s own jealousy”), or a subjective genitive (“a jealousy that God inspires”). Whichever grammatical possibility is preferred, the choice does not detract from the fact that Paul is claiming that he is experiencing the same emotion as God at this point. The only other occasion where these two words are used in combination in the NT is in Rom 10:2 (ζηλον θεοῦ ἔχουσιν), but here an objective genitive would seem to fit best (“they have a zeal for God”).

³² The LXX reads ἐν τῷ ζηλωσαί μου τὸν ζηλον ἐν αὐτοῖς (Num 25:11), while Paul writes ζηλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς θεοῦ ζηλω (2 Cor 11:2). In both cases the intensity of the emotion is indicated by the use of the verb and noun together. This combination is unusual and is found elsewhere only in Zech 1:14; 8:2; Jdt 9:4; 1 Macc 2:54, 58.

³³ Paul and Phinehas are particularly clear examples of an emotion of God being expressed through one of his covenant mediators. According to Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 61, some prophets were so endowed with the Spirit that they could “carry out their commission under the constraint of a consuming emotional-ethical sympathy with the holy righteousness and truth of God.” A particularly clear case in point comes after the golden calf incident to which God responds with burning anger (Exod 32:10-12), as does Moses (Exod 32:19, 22). In the Hebrew the same words are used in both cases. Moses here completely mirrors the emotional reaction of Yahweh. Just as his anger was expressed by Moses, so also God’s jealousy was expressed by Phinehas and Paul.

Paul's fear is twofold. He is afraid that the minds of his converts will be corrupted and that they will lose their initial single-mindedness and purity.³⁴ Paul's betrothal illustration in v. 2 is carried over into v. 3. This explains both his jealousy and fear. As Harris has pointed out:

When the Corinthian church was betrothed to Christ, she was a "pure maiden," adhering to pure doctrine. Paul's fear now is that her original purity or virginity might be forfeited through the enticements of paramours. If she adhered to the false doctrine of the intruders (v. 4), she would lose the pristine purity that she had "in relation to Christ" . . . , her heavenly bridegroom and one husband. As purveyors of a false gospel (v. 4), Paul's rivals were those who (unwittingly) were defiling a betrothed maiden.³⁵

Paul's fear is therefore best explained by the logic of his argument. He claims that the new teaching indicates the machinations of Satan. The apostle draws some unflattering parallels. His opponents are like the serpent in Eden and their teachings are deceptive.³⁶ The Corinthians are like Eve whose mind was corrupted. The situation therefore has all the hallmarks of the primeval temptation and the results could likewise be catastrophic. Just as Eve fell from perfect fellowship with God, so the Corinthians might jeopardize their relationship with Christ. They were in a precarious situation akin to that of the Galatians to whom Paul had written, "I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain" (Gal 4:11). As he had previously been anxious for the Galatians, he is now anxious for the Corinthians. In both cases there had been the enticement of another gospel (Gal 1:6; 2 Cor 11:4). For the Corinthians, flirting with another gospel carries with it the real danger of spiritual adultery. They could yet become unfaithful to their Betrothed. That awful possibility fills Paul with anxiety. But his fear does not stand alone. Because of Paul's key role in the betrothal this fear is coupled with the divine jealousy of the prospective Bridegroom.

The juxtaposition of Paul's divine jealousy in v. 2 and his very human anxiety in v. 3 presents an emotional combination with which the modern reader may find it difficult to identify. Yet these two emotions dominate chapters 10-13, especially "the fool's speech" which Paul introduces in v. 1. In this introduction he pleads for his readers' tolerance or even indulgence: "I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me!" (ESV).³⁷ The reason he can ask for their indulgence is because he is both jealous for them and afraid for them. His jealousy and fear drive him to take the unusual step of boasting about his achievements and credentials. So strong are these emotions that Paul, against his better judgment, is prepared to make a complete fool of himself for the sake of his readers.

11:11 Love

One of Paul's main boasts is that he preached the gospel to the Corinthians free of charge. As he explains in vv. 7-12:

⁷ Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you without charge?

⁸ I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to serve you;

⁹ and when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone; for when the brethren came from Macedonia, they fully supplied my need, and in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and will continue to do so.

³⁴ Not all ancient manuscripts included the words "and purity," but their inclusion has some impressive support. For a detailed discussion of this textual problem see Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 514-15. In all probability Paul is referring to the Corinthians' single-minded devotion to Christ as well as their doctrinal purity.

³⁵ Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 740.

³⁶ Cf. Jerry L. Sumney, "Paul's Use of Πάθος in His Argument against the Opponents in 2 Corinthians," in Thomas H. Olbricht and Jerry L. Sumney (eds.), *Paul and Pathos*, SBL Symposium Series 16 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 155, "Paul does not stop at calling them shameful boasters; he also characterizes them as deceitful. The *synkrisis* [comparison] begun in 10:12-18 continues in 11:1-6 with Paul contrasting himself as a loving father with his opponents, who occupy the place of the cunning serpent who led Eve to sin . . . Paul implicitly describes them as evil and malicious without having to give evidence for such charges simply by using the metaphor of the serpent and Eve."

³⁷ The verb ἀνέχεσθαι in v.1 can be taken either as an indicative or an imperative. Although English translations vary, the imperative mood makes better sense in the context. Paul seems to be asking for his readers' indulgence rather than assuming he already has it. Moreover, in vv. 16-19 there is a further plea that they tolerate a little foolishness.

¹⁰ *As the truth of Christ is in me, this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia.*

¹¹ *Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!*

¹² *But what I am doing, I will continue to do, that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting.*

Paul's refusal to accept payment from the Corinthians had a long history. When Paul first arrived in Corinth he worked as a tent-maker with Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:1-3). During this time he reasoned in the Jewish synagogue every Sabbath (Acts 18:4). It was not till Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia that "Paul began devoting himself completely to the word" (Acts 18:5). Although the reason for Paul's shift from part-time to full-time ministry of the word in Corinth is not given in the Acts account, it later becomes clear that Silas and Timothy did not arrive from Macedonia empty-handed. In his letter to the Philippians Paul reminds his readers that "at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs" (Phil 4:15, 16). With members like Lydia, "a seller of purple fabrics" (Acts 16:14), whose business was no doubt at the upper end of town, the church at Philippi was probably better placed than most to support Paul's pioneering ministry. The gift that was entrusted to Silas and Timothy not only enabled Paul to transition to completely dedicating himself to gospel ministry at Corinth, it also fully provided for his need (2 Cor 11:9). It seems that in his tent-making business Paul did not manage to make ends meet during his early days at Corinth.³⁸ Even so, he insisted on not receiving any payment for his services, not wanting to be a burden on the Corinthians. This became a consistent policy throughout his Corinthian ministry.

Paul's financial policy for his ministry at Corinth is stated most fully in his spirited defence of his apostleship in 1 Cor 9. But his argumentation in this chapter is unusual, to say the least. In the early part of the chapter he pours on one rhetorical question after another insisting on his apostolic right to their financial support (vv. 1-14). With every available argument he puts the case that he is entitled to their remuneration, only to conclude after all that, that they should not support him (vv. 15-18). His conclusion is the precise opposite of what he had led us to expect, i.e. "an explanation, indeed defense, of his policy of *not* accepting that for which he has argued so strenuously."³⁹ In defending his policy of refusing their financial support he uses very strong language. In v. 12 he is prepared to forego his rights and "endure all things that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ." In v. 15 he insists that "it would be better for me to die than have any man make my boast an empty one." Finally in v. 18 he states rather paradoxically that his only payment is to receive no payment: "What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel."

Paul's unusual financial policy is seized upon by his critics in 2 Corinthians. Yet even when he comes under fire for his alleged inconsistency he does not waver. "As the truth of Christ is in me," he says, "this boasting of mine will not be stopped in the regions of Achaia" (2 Cor 11:10). The intruders were apparently putting pressure on him to change his policy and like them accept fees for his services, but he refuses to buckle, insisting that even on his planned third visit to Corinth he will not be a burden on his spiritual children (2 Cor 12:14). So from beginning to end Paul's financial policy at Corinth remains the same – he insists on preaching the gospel to them free of charge.

All of this of course raises some serious questions. Paul's financial ethics seem to be riddled with contradictory statements and ambiguities. While he makes a particular point of remaining financially independent of the Corinthians, he seems more than happy to accept support from the Philippians. In fact, his early tent-making efforts plus the monetary gift from Macedonia is what financed Paul's ministry at Corinth in Acts 18, while at the same he steadfastly refused compensation from the local church. On the surface his attitude appears paradoxical, even offensive. How can it best be explained?

³⁸ Cf. Hughes' comments on v. 9: "The extreme precariousness, humanly speaking, of the Apostle's livelihood is thrown into quite startling relief by this revelation that when he was in Corinth he had actually been in want; he had not, for some time, possessed the wherewithal even for providing the bare necessities of existence" (2 Corinthians, 386-87).

³⁹ Fee, 1 Corinthians, 392 (emphasis mine).

In contemporary scholarship this problem is solved most commonly by an appeal to the widespread practice of patronage. From the Corinthians' point of view, according to Barnett, "Paul had painfully breached social conventions in rejecting their patronage of money, gifts, and hospitality, which were at that time conventionally given to those who taught and lectured."⁴⁰ Harris agrees and further argues that Paul "may have wished to avoid entering a relationship that could be construed as a patron-client contract which placed him under certain social obligations to a restricted segment of a church."⁴¹ Julien Ogereau is prepared to take matters even further and names those in the Corinthian church who could have been Paul's potential patrons:

Based on the Corinthian correspondence, one could argue that Paul seemed altogether uncomfortable with the social conventions and obligations of Roman patronage, literary patronage especially . . . I assume that in Corinth Paul expressed a certain reluctance to enter into a *personal*, socially and economically binding relationship with potentially powerful and demanding patrons, as he discerned the higher social levels of some of the Gentile believers (such as Gaius, Erastus, Stephanas, Phoebe, etc.). For, as we are all aware, it is most likely in Corinth that for the first time individuals from the elite or sub-elite social strata were converted.⁴²

The difficulty with this view, however, is the assumption that the Corinthian situation was unique. This was clearly not the case, and that on two counts: (a) in both Ephesus (Acts 20:33-35) and in Thessalonica (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8) Paul was self-supporting and received no remuneration, and (b), as we have already seen in the case of Lydia at Philippi, other churches do seem to have had wealthy patrons among their number. Therefore, as Ben Witherington has pointed out, Paul's refusal to accept patronage does not tell the whole story: "Paul, for the sake of independence and for the sake of a free offering of the Gospel, appears to have frequently avoided the 'honey trap' of reciprocity and patronage. But as Philippians shows, there were some conditions under which he would enter into a relationship of 'giving and receiving' with at least one group of his converts."⁴³ The patronage theory, therefore, in spite of its wide appeal, does not appear to do justice to all the facts.

Not surprisingly then, this dominant view has recently been strongly challenged. First in his doctoral thesis⁴⁴ and then in its published version,⁴⁵ David Briones has put the patronage theory under the microscope and developed an alternative explanation. He argues that Paul's financial policy can be divided into two stages:

- (a) The first stage is his initial entry into a particular city: "No matter the location, no matter the situation, Paul consistently refused monetary support from the people to whom he was ministering. Whether at Philippi (Phil. 4:15), Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:9), or Corinth (1 Cor. 9:12, 15, 18), this *specific* policy remained the same – he worked a trade and denied fiscal aid."⁴⁶ During this pioneering stage of his mission to a new city he remained self-supportive and financially independent, presumably to distinguish himself from sophists, itinerant philosophers and other teachers and to draw attention to God as the original source of the gospel.⁴⁷
- (b) The second stage is Paul's initial departure from one city and initial entrance into another: "While stage 1 is repeated in the new city, stage 2 takes place with the recently established city. So, for instance, we learn that Paul accepted gifts from Philippi during his initial ministry at Thessalonica (Phil. 4:16) and Corinth (2 Cor. 11:9), while

⁴⁰ Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 513.

⁴¹ Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 765.

⁴² Julien M. Ogereau, "Reflections on Paul and the Economics of Patronage," *Society for the Study of Early Christianity Newsletter* 68 (September, 2010): 5 (emphasis his).

⁴³ Ben Witherington III, "You Be the Judge: Social History as a Window on Early Christianity," *Society for the Study of Early Christianity Newsletter* 67 (June, 2010): 5.

⁴⁴ David E. Briones, "Paul's Financial Policy: A Socio-theological Approach" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Durham, 2011).

⁴⁵ David E. Briones, *Paul's Financial Policy: A Socio-theological Approach*, LNTS 494 (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

⁴⁶ Briones, "Paul's Financial Policy," 327 (emphasis his).

⁴⁷ Cf. Julien M. Ogereau, review of David E. Briones, *Paul's Financial Policy: A Socio-theological Approach*, *RBL* 06 (2015): 4.

simultaneously working a trade in order not to burden the Corinthians or the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:9).⁴⁸ Paul's apparent double standard can therefore easily be explained by an overlapping of these two stages.

In the case of the Corinthians, however, a further factor comes into play. Within the two-stage process, the Philippians had progressed from stage 1 to stage 2. After he left Philippi they assisted Paul financially during his initial ministry in both Thessalonica and Corinth. The Corinthians, on the other hand, because of their spiritual immaturity never progressed past stage 1. This immaturity was of such a nature that it provoked Paul to insist on refusing their financial support.⁴⁹ It also played into the hands of the interlopers in 2 Cor 10-13: "For the continuing presence of the rival apostles is a direct corollary of the community's worldly preoccupation with honour, status, and worth, expressed through the cultural mores of rhetorical eloquence, presumptuous boasting, and a powerful self-display, all of which the opponents extravagantly flaunted."⁵⁰ As long as the Corinthians' lifestyle continued to be informed more by the cultural values of the world rather than by the counter-cultural values of the gospel Paul would refuse their financial support. It was therefore because of their spiritual immaturity that he prevented them from moving from stage 1 to stage 2.⁵¹

While it is true that Briones' "clear and original answer to a vexed question makes his study a worthwhile read, and indeed an important contribution to Pauline scholarship,"⁵² it is not without its difficulties. The main fly in the ointment of his argument is of course the offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem, a subject to which his work gives surprisingly little attention. Yet this offering is emphasized repeatedly throughout Paul's Corinthian correspondence (1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9; 12:16-18). It would appear curious indeed if Paul considered the Corinthians spiritually mature enough to contribute to the Jerusalem offering but not mature enough to support his further missionary work. Can it therefore be convincingly argued that in terms of Paul's financial policy he did not allow the Corinthians to progress from stage 1 to stage 2 when he repeatedly asks them to support the Jerusalem collection? Arguably, when he wrote 2 Corinthians, the Jerusalem collection was not only very much on Paul's mind, but was also the next major project in his global missionary enterprise.

What the current debate surrounding Paul's financial policy does highlight, however, is that his refusal of monetary support from the Corinthians could have been construed as highly offensive. According to the patronage theory Paul's refusal would have been regarded as a social snub and as a slap in the face of accepted conventions. The alternative theory suggests that – compared to their natural rivals, the Macedonians – the Corinthians were considered by Paul to be spiritually immature and therefore not ready to give him their financial support. Either way it becomes understandable that the Corinthians felt slighted and perhaps even deeply hurt.⁵³ Unsurprisingly they protest that Paul does not love them (2 Cor 11:11).

Paul's response to their understandable protestation is a master stroke of brevity: "Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!" While there may be some truth to the observation that "he does not bother to dignify this accusation with a reasoned reply,"⁵⁴ there is wisdom to his apparent curtness. He has enough pastoral experience to know that any further attempt to justify his motives would be fruitless. He therefore appeals to the omniscience of God. Time and again in this epistle he assures the Corinthians of his love for them (2:4; 6:6; 8:7; 12:15). On this occasion, however, he goes further. He places his love for the Corinthians before the highest court of appeal. Only God knows what lives in his heart. Therefore he is prepared to use an oath formula to underscore the reality and intensity of his love. As Harris explains, "God read Paul's heart and knew the intensity of his love as well as the motives for his actions that he had outlined in vv. 7-10. We may sense the ardor of Paul's agitated emotions here by the successive oaths in vv. 10-11 and the extraordinary brevity of the two questions and one affirmation in v. 11."⁵⁵ On other occasions too Paul calls on God

⁴⁸ Briones, "Paul's Financial Policy," 328.

⁴⁹ Briones, "Paul's Financial Policy," 286.

⁵⁰ Briones, "Paul's Financial Policy," 315.

⁵¹ Briones, "Paul's Financial Policy," 334.

⁵² Ogereau, review of Briones, *Paul's Financial Policy*, 4.

⁵³ Cf. Hodge, *2 Corinthians*, 260: "He was determined to assume towards them a position of entire independence. This was doubtless very painful to the faithful in Corinth. They could not but regard it as a proof either of the want of love or the want of confidence on his part."

⁵⁴ Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 246-47.

⁵⁵ Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 767.

as witness to matters of his heart that only God could know, such as his unceasing prayers for the Christians in Rome (Rom 1:9), his heartfelt sorrow for the plight of unbelieving Jews (Rom 9:2), his motives for not visiting the Corinthians sooner (2 Cor 1:23), his longing for the Philippians (Phil 1:8), and the sincerity of his speech to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 2:5). Likewise, before God, Paul can vouch that his love for the Corinthians is the genuine article. No further explanations should be necessary. His financial policy in Corinth notwithstanding, the Corinthians have no reason to question the apostle's unfeigned love for them.

11:29 Inward Burning

The jealousy, fear and love which Paul had spoken of earlier in 2 Cor 11 lead to the deep emotion that Paul expresses towards the end of the chapter:

²⁸ *Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.*

²⁹ *Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?* (NIV).

Paul is now well into the "fool's speech" proper (11:16-12:13). Against his better judgment he is boasting that he is a better servant of Christ than his opponents - like them he has impeccable Jewish credentials (v. 22) and he has suffered far more humiliations than they in the service of Christ (vv. 23-27). But apart from such external indignities as imprisonments, beatings, stoning, shipwrecks, perilous journeys, sleepless nights and physical deprivation, he also experiences suffering for Christ at a deeper level, an anxious concern for churches and individuals that is no doubt foreign to his opponents (vv. 28-29). His catalogue of physical difficulties refers to what is objective and external, his anxious concern is subjective and painfully internal. While his outward hardships come and go, these inward struggles are constant and ongoing. On a daily basis the jealousy (v. 2), fear (v. 3) and love (v. 11) which he feels for the Corinthians come to expression even more broadly in his anxious and intense concern for all the churches (v. 28), and especially for the weak and stumbling within those churches (v. 29). While vv. 23-27 refer to intermittent physical hardships that lay in the past, vv. 28-29 refer to a single constant spiritual burden in the present.⁵⁶ It is in these latter verses that Paul's list reaches its climax. More than anything else, he was impacted by his daily concern for all the churches.⁵⁷

But what exactly is Paul's concern and what is the nature of its emotional component? Paul's concern for all the churches is probably best understood as a constant weight or pressure "in the sense of anxiety caused by a heavy sense of responsibility."⁵⁸ What is stated more generally in v. 28 comes to specific expression in v. 29. Paul's concern expresses itself particularly in (a) his empathy and identification with the weak ("Who is weak without my being weak?"), the precise nature of their weakness being left unstated,⁵⁹ and (b) his inward burning over those who are made to stumble into sin ("Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" NIV). While Paul's empathy for the weak is clear enough, the emotion lying behind the metaphor of inwardly burning needs further investigation.

The Greek verb that carries the metaphor is *πυρόομαι* ("burn, be inflamed"). It is found six times in the NT and is used in both a literal and metaphorical sense (1 Cor 7:9; 2 Cor 11:29; Eph 6:16; 2 Pet 3:12; Rev 1:15; 3:18). Only Paul uses the verb metaphorically. In 1 Cor 7:9 he uses it to refer to unmarried people who are burning with passion. This is clearly not the sense in the verse under investigation! But precisely what Paul does have in mind is difficult to pinpoint with any degree of accuracy. Many English translations and paraphrases, like the NIV, perhaps wisely refuse to assign a specific emotion to Paul at this point. Those that do are far from unanimous:

"When someone is led into sin, I am filled with distress" (TEV).

⁵⁶ Thus Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 811.

⁵⁷ See Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 549.

⁵⁸ BDAG, 380.

⁵⁹ Possibilities include the physical weakness that results from illness or persecution, moral or psychological weakness in the sense of being faint-hearted or fearful, weakness of conscience, or perhaps even weakness in the sociological sense of lacking power and status. In the absence of further information a firm choice between these various alternatives remains difficult. See the discussion in Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 813-14.

“Who falls without my longing to help him?” (LB)

“Does anyone have his faith upset without my burning with indignation?” (Phillips).

“When any man is made to fall I am tortured” (JB).

“Who is made to fall/stumble, and I am not indignant?” (RSV, ESV / NRSV).

“If anyone is made to stumble, does my heart not blaze with indignation?” (NEB, cf. Knox, Holman).

Of the thirteen translations and paraphrases surveyed, eight suggested that Paul burned with indignation. This also seems to be a popular view among commentators, although consensus remains elusive. For a clearer understanding of Paul’s intended meaning we may therefore need to cast our exegetical net more widely and cover more data than that found in the NT.

In the canonical LXX *πυρόω* occurs 21x. The main metaphorical use of this verb refers to being refined by fire as silver or gold is refined. If Paul is using this image he might therefore mean that when another believer stumbles he himself is refined. While this meaning is possible, it is probably unlikely, as the simile is usually spelled out in the LXX, e.g. “as silver is refined” (Job 22:25; Psa 65 (66):10; Zech 13:9).

It is only in the Apocrypha that *πυρόω* is used in a metaphorical sense with respect to the emotions. Thus it is possible for people to be “inflamed with anger” (τοις θυμοις) in 2 Macc 2:38; 10:35; 14:45, but it is also possible to “inflamed with groanings” (στενωγμοις) in 3 Macc 4:2. In the latter case the context is clearly one of sorrow: “Yet among the Judeans there was indescribable grief and a mournful outburst of tears, *their hearts altogether inflamed from groaning*, as they bewailed the unforeseen destruction suddenly decreed for them.”⁶⁰

Unlike the examples in the Apocrypha, Paul’s inward burning in 2 Cor 11:29 leaves the emotion unspecified. It is therefore quite possible that more than one emotion is involved. As there are recorded instances of both burning with anger and burning with grief, could both of these emotions feature in Paul’s response to believers being led into sin? A combination of these two emotions would certainly make good sense in the context. As Harris has explained, “The emotions that consumed Paul when he saw or heard that a fellow-Christian had been led into sin were *distress* at that person’s fall and *anger* at those responsible for the ‘ruining’ of a brother or sister for whom Christ died (cf. 1 Cor 8:11).”⁶¹ Hodge comes to a similar conclusion: “Such events filled him not only with *grief* at the fall of the weak, but with *indignation* at the authors of their fall.”⁶² On at least one occasion this combination of emotions is attributed to Jesus. When the Pharisees were watching to see if he would heal on the Sabbath, Mark observes that Jesus “looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart” (Mark 3:5). In this connection Warfield, with perceptive insight into human nature, has remarked that “the fundamental psychology of anger is curiously illustrated by this account; for anger always has pain at its root, and is a reaction of the soul against what gives it discomfort.”⁶³ Anger fuelled by grief could therefore well be the emotion involved in Paul’s being “inwardly burned.”⁶⁴ It would be an appropriate response to the potential damage the intruders might do at Corinth.

12:9 Gladness

After the possibly mixed emotions of anger and grief the next emotion that comes to expression in the “fool’s speech” is Paul’s unadulterated gladness:

⁶⁰ Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, *A New Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 525 (emphasis mine).

⁶¹ Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 815 (emphasis mine).

⁶² Hodge, *2 Corinthians*, 276 (emphasis mine).

⁶³ Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1950), 108.

⁶⁴ Other combinations of emotions are possible, although probably less convincing in the context, e.g. indignation, remorse and shame (Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 295); shame, indignation and compassion (Hughes, *2 Corinthians*, 418); anger and love (*EDNT* 3:200); sympathetic sorrow (*TDNT* 6:950).

⁹ *And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.*

In chapter 11 Paul had been boasting of his weaknesses—the external hardships he had encountered in ministry (vv. 23-27), his sense of burden for the churches (vv. 28-29), and even the initial indignity of being lowered over the walls of Damascus in a basket (vv. 30-33). In chapter 12 he ventures into what for him is far more controversial territory. He will now boast of the kinds of experiences that his opponents would be inclined to boast about, namely “visions and revelations of the Lord” (12:1).

In broaching this subject Paul again seems to be going against his better judgment. He therefore begins cautiously, and he certainly has his reservations. “Boasting is necessary,” he says, but then immediately he adds a qualification, “though it is not profitable” (v. 1). What follows in vv. 2-6 is the description of another-worldly and perhaps out-of-body experience that is portrayed with the greatest possible reserve and detachment. Although the experience was obviously Paul’s own, he consistently refers to himself in the third person (vv. 2-5a). He refuses to go into detail, describing neither what he saw nor what he heard. All that he divulges is that fourteen years earlier he had been caught up into Paradise or the third heaven (vv. 2, 4). Although Paul’s experience of being caught up to heaven was literally out of this world and therefore indescribably glorious, he does not dwell on it. In marked contrast to his opponents, who no doubt would have capitalized on an experience like this,⁶⁵ Paul’s focus lies elsewhere.

Rather than highlighting the majestic visions and revelations he was permitted to see, Paul passes over them rather quickly. Instead he draws attention to his “thorn in the flesh” (v. 7). Whatever it was – and after almost two thousand years expositors are no closer to a precise identification – the thorn was intended to prick Paul’s potentially inflated ego. He refers to it as “a messenger of Satan to buffet me – to keep me from exalting myself” (v. 7). Although it was clearly meant as a deterrent against spiritual pride, he asked the Lord on three separate occasions to take it away. But, presumably after the last request, the Lord gave a definitive answer.⁶⁶ In contrast to the “inexpressible words which a man is not permitted to speak” (v. 4), which Paul heard in Paradise, Jesus now speaks to his servant in clear, communicable language. “My grace is sufficient for you,” he says, “for power is perfected in weakness,” (v. 9). This is the only occasion where Jesus is quoted directly in this epistle. The fact that he is loved and empowered by Jesus should be enough for Paul. The aphorism that “power is perfected in weakness” is the ultimate and climactic paradox in 2 Corinthians.⁶⁷ In demonstrating his power through Paul’s weakness Jesus most manifestly displays his grace. In boasting of his weaknesses that the power of Christ may rest on him Paul most clearly reflects the life/death paradox epitomized in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The central acts of redemption are now realized in Paul’s own experience.

Small wonder that Paul can declare, “*Mostly gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me*” (v. 9b). Without the reassuring words of Jesus in the first part of the verse, Paul’s best response to his thorn in the flesh might well have been one of fateful resignation. Armed with Jesus’ words, however, Paul is able to respond with joyful acceptance. More than that, not only is he able to accept his weaknesses – such as the thorn (v. 7), insults, distresses, persecutions and difficulties (v. 10) – he is even able to boast about them “most gladly.” The emotion is a strong one. The adverb ἥδιστα is in the superlative degree and is used in an elative sense.⁶⁸ In all of Scripture it is found only here and in v. 15. It could also be translated as “all the more gladly” (BDAG, ESV, NIV, NRSV, RSV), “very happily” (JB, TEV) or even as “cheerfully” (Phillips). It is a very positive emotion.

⁶⁵ Thus Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 264.

⁶⁶ Significantly Jesus’ answer to Paul’s threefold request is introduced by a verb in the perfect tense, εἶρηκέν (“he said”). The implication is that although the answer was given in the past, it has abiding significance and its results continue into the present. It also suggests that the reply was final.

⁶⁷ Hughes, *2 Corinthians*, 451, calls verse 9 “the summit of the epistle, the lofty peak from which the whole is viewed in true proportion.” Cf. Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 572, “Power in weakness, therefore, runs as a thread throughout the letter, reaching its most powerful expression here.”

⁶⁸ Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 303.

Not to be overlooked is the further comparative adverb “rather” (μᾶλλον): “Most gladly, therefore, I will *rather* boast about my weaknesses.” What is the point of the comparison here? Would Paul rather boast of his weaknesses than have his thorn removed?⁶⁹ Or is he suggesting that he would rather boast than complain? Although both of these alternatives are possible in the immediate context, the broader context would indicate that he would rather boast of his weaknesses than of “visions and revelations of the Lord” (v. 1).⁷⁰ Rather than give a detailed description of the third heaven, he would prefer to concentrate on his weaknesses, which he has been doing all along. The distresses, persecutions and difficulties mentioned in v. 10 have already been referred to in 2 Cor 6:4; 4:9 and 6:4 respectively. Throughout this epistle he has been boasting of his weaknesses. He is in a completely different league to his opponents. By emphasizing his weaknesses he totally demolishes their arguments (cf. 10:3-5). His one-line quote from Jesus is the *coup de grâce*. The grace and power of Jesus are not demonstrated in the intruders’ eloquence and brilliant performance but rather in Paul’s weaknesses. Worldly values have been put on their head.

12:15 Gladness and Love

In the paragraph that is made up of vv. 11-13 Paul brings his “fool’s speech” to a close. He reminds the Corinthians that they had driven him to the folly of self-commendation because in the face of criticisms against him by the “super-apostles” they had failed to come to his defence (v. 11). Then, in one last instance of self-commendation, he reminds them that when he was with them “the signs of a true apostle were performed among you” (v. 12). In no way was the church at Corinth treated as inferior to the other churches, except in one respect – he did not become a burden to them. No doubt significantly, Paul returns to the sore point that is his financial policy, which had been a major topic earlier in his speech (11:7-15). Now he picks it up again at the end. Clearly the Corinthians still held his insistence on the non-remuneration for his services against him. So he concludes the “fool’s speech” with a heartfelt plea, “Forgive me this wrong!” (v. 13). This plea is probably not as sarcastic as some expositors suggest. In the eyes of at least some at Corinth Paul had been guilty of a massive social blunder.

So although Paul changes tack in v. 14 by no longer speaking as a fool but by simply planning for his third visit to Corinth (12:14-13:10), he does not change subjects. In preparing the Corinthians for his next visit he begins by reminding them that his financial policy is not about to change. He has not been a financial burden to them in the past (v. 13) and he has no intention of becoming a financial burden to them in the future (v. 14). As their spiritual parent he has a responsibility to save up for them rather than vice versa. He doesn’t want their money. He wants them (cf. 6:11-13; 7:2). His language is becoming intensely personal and deeply emotive. Some of the specific emotions he is experiencing spill out in the next verse: *And I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less?* (v. 15).

Because Paul is their spiritual father (1 Cor 4:15; 2 Cor 6:13), not only does he put aside and save for the Corinthians (v. 14), he also spends for them (v. 15). More than that, he both spends and is expended⁷¹ – and that “for your souls.” The tabs are on him, and in more ways than one. His financial policy at Corinth extends much further than his not accepting their financial support. His language subtly shifts from being literal to being metaphorical. When it comes to the welfare of their souls, no expense will be spared. When he says he will spend for them, the primary reference would seem to be to spending money, as it is on every other occasion where this verb occurs in the NT (Mark 5:26; Luke 15:14; Acts 21:24; James 4:3). When it comes to any costs involved in his ministry at Corinth, he will meet the expenses as he has done from the beginning, since his initial tent-making ministry among them. But more is involved. He will also be expended for their souls. Here the turn of phrase “spend and be spent” becomes decidedly metaphorical. Not only will

⁶⁹ Cf. Hodge, *2 Corinthians*, 287, who paraphrases Paul as saying, “I will rather glory in infirmities than seek deliverance.”

⁷⁰ See Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 575; Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 865.

⁷¹ Paul first uses the simple verb *δαπανήσω* (“I will spend”) and then the intensive compound *ἐκδαπανηθήσομαι* (“I will be expended”). The latter verb is used only here in the NT. BDAG, 200, explains that it is used figuratively in the sense of “*be spent* of the sacrifice of one’s own life . . . for someone.” It is another example of Paul using words in pairs, where second word intensifies the first, as also in 1:13; 4:8 (Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 585).

he spend his resources for them, he is prepared himself to be spent or expended for them. As Linda Belleville has pointed out, “The human father stores up for his children. Paul not only does this (*spend*) but does so to the very limit of his capability (*expend*) . . . What Paul expends is not merely his finances but himself – that is, his time, energy, affection, reputation and, if need be, his health.”⁷² Tasker has written in the same vein, “The price to be paid might well be impoverished health and premature old age; but such a price was not too great in so high an endeavour.”⁷³ In short, Paul is willing not only to spend his resources but even to sacrifice his life for the sake of the Corinthians.⁷⁴ Remarkably he does all of this “most gladly.” It is the same word (ἡδίστα) that he has just used in v. 9. Not only does he boast most gladly of his weaknesses, he is just as glad to spend and be spent for the sake of his converts’ souls.

All of this is of course an indication of his sacrificial love for the church at Corinth. Sadly his deep parental love is not reciprocated by his spiritual children: “If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less?” (v. 15b). Here Paul is saying more than he did back in 6:11-13, where he had complained that in response to his heart being opened wide to them they were “restrained in their affections” (6:12). Barnett has perceptively summed up the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians at that point: “He is their father whose heart is *wide* with love for them, his children; his affection for them is not narrow and tight, but broad. But they regard Paul coldly with very narrow affection.”⁷⁵ In chapter 6 Paul had drawn a contrast between his wide, open-hearted love for them and their narrow, restrained affection for him. In chapter 12 he takes matters further. The Corinthians’ love for Paul is in fact in inverse proportion to his love for them. The more he loves them, the less they love him. As Harris puts it, “the warmer his love, the cooler theirs!”⁷⁶ And it all has to do with his financial policy. What he sees as self-sacrificial love on his part, they find offensive. Whether they think of him as having flouted social convention or resent the fact that he thought of them as less spiritually mature than the churches in Macedonia, the result is the same. They view his financial policy as evidence of a lack of love for them and as a result they withhold their love from him. Even worse, some at Corinth are insinuating that his financial dealings with them have been fraudulent. He has been using the Jerusalem offering and the services of his associates to line his own pockets (vv. 16-17). Paul scotches this rumour very smartly. Both he and Titus have always acted with the greatest integrity, as the Corinthians know only too well (v. 18). There is no reason for them not to return his love. It is fatherly, heartfelt, sacrificial and above reproach.

12:20-21 Fear and Mourning

Having reiterated his financial policy with the Corinthians, Paul anticipates an objection in the minds of his readers. From what he has just written, and indeed from the letter as a whole, they may have gained the impression that he has been writing in self-defence. While it is true that he has been defending himself against such charges as lovelessness and financial duplicity, his main object in writing was nevertheless the edification of his readers (v. 19).⁷⁷ That they needed edification becomes abundantly clear from the fears he expresses in the verses that follow (vv. 20-21):

²⁰ *For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there may be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances;*

²¹ *(I am afraid)⁷⁸ that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.*

A syntactical analysis of the Greek text shows that Paul’s fears dominate these verses.⁷⁹ In the Greek vv. 20-21 are made up of a single sentence. The basic syntax of this sentence can best be outlined as follows:

⁷² Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 317.

⁷³ Tasker, *2 Corinthians*, 182.

⁷⁴ See Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 272.

⁷⁵ Barnett, *Paul – A Pastor’s Heart*, 86.

⁷⁶ Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 887.

⁷⁷ Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 893.

⁷⁸ These words have been bracketed as they do not appear in the Greek text, but for the sake of clarity the NASB repeats them from the previous verse.

⁷⁹ The only other occurrence of the verb φοβέομαι in this epistle is in 11:3 where Paul is afraid that “your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (as discussed above). Paul’s two sets of fears are not unrelated.

For I am afraid

- (a) that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish;
- (b) that perhaps there may be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances;
- (c) that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.

From this sentence flow it appears that Paul is afraid of three things – (a), (b) and (c). Upon closer inspection, however, it appears that he is probably afraid only of (a) and that (a) is made up of (b) and (c).⁸⁰ He is afraid that he may find them not as he wishes, i.e. marked by strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances. But he is also afraid that they may also find him not as they wish, i.e. humiliated by God and mourning over those who have sinned and not repented.

Hence his fear is wide-ranging and his mourning is a subset of his fear. *πενθήσω* can either be taken as a future indicative (“I will mourn”) or as an aorist subjunctive (“I may mourn”). In the grammatical context the latter is probably preferable.⁸¹ He is saying that he is afraid he may mourn, rather than that he will mourn. The possibility that he will mourn is one of his fears. He is not predicting that he will mourn.

Perhaps the subtext here is that his hopes are the opposite of his fears, i.e. he will find them as he wants them to be and they will find him as they want him to be. He will find them living disciplined moral lives in harmony and peace, and they will find him exalted by God and rejoicing over those who have repented.

From Paul’s earlier experiences with the Corinthians, however, it would appear that his fears were not unfounded. Of the eight vices listed in v. 20, the first two (i.e. strife and jealousy) had already been in evidence earlier in congregational life in Corinth (1 Cor 1:11; 3:3). There is little indication from Paul’s ongoing correspondence with them that the Corinthians had successfully dealt with these problems. Rather, he fears that, especially with the arrival of the intruders, their tendency to strife and jealousy could easily lead to the bad behaviours he goes on to enumerate. Likewise the immorality of which he is afraid in v. 20 seems to be an ongoing problem which he had also addressed earlier (1 Cor 5:1; 6:13-18; 7:2). While the problem with the immoral man who had sexual relations with his step-mother (1 Cor 5:1ff.) eventually seems to have been dealt with (2 Cor 2:5-11), it appears there were others in the congregation who had not decisively broken with their earlier practices. It would probably be going too far to suggest that Jewish members were guilty of the divisive behaviour of v. 20, while Gentiles were inclined to the immoral behaviour of v. 21, but Paul obviously had his concerns for both groups. If they persisted in the sins to which they were naturally inclined, then Paul would indeed be humiliated, as he had been on his previous visit to Corinth (2 Cor 2:1-5). His worst fears would be realized. He would also have reason to mourn.

The mourning of which Paul speaks here has been defined as “to experience sadness as the result of some condition or circumstance, *be sad, grieve, mourn*.”⁸² The verb *πενθέω* occurs nine times in the NT, mostly in the sense of grieving or mourning over sin (Matt 5:4; 9:15; Luke 6:25; 1 Cor 5:2; 2 Cor 12:21; James 4:9), a use that is also found in some cases in the LXX (1 Esdras 8:72; 9:2; 2 Esdras 10:6). In the two Pauline examples the verb refers to mourning over the sexual sins of others. As Rudolf Bultmann explains, “In 1 C. 5:2 *πενθεῖν* . . . denotes grief at the shame brought on the community by the case of incest, or sorrow over a church in which such a thing is possible. Paul uses *πενθεῖν* in much the same way at 2 C. 12:21, when he bewails the sin that stains the church.”⁸³ This is a helpful insight, except of course

⁸⁰ Cf. Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 323-24.

⁸¹ Grammatically *πενθήσω* seems to be most closely linked to *ταπεινώσει* (which is unambiguously an aorist subjunctive) in the preceding clause. Paul is therefore afraid both that God will humiliate him and that as a result he will mourn. Most EVV indicate this connection by rendering these verbs consistently as either “will humiliate . . . will mourn” or as “may humiliate . . . may mourn.” An exception is JB which reads, “God *may* make me ashamed on your account and I *shall* be grieving” (emphasis mine). This seems to be the only translation which takes the first verb as an aorist subjunctive and the second as a future indicative.

⁸² BDAG, 795.

⁸³ TDNT 6:43.

that Paul is not actually bewailing the sin that stains the church, but is afraid that he may be doing so when he arrives in Corinth. His fear is a present reality, his mourning a future possibility. No doubt he still entertains the quiet hope that it will not come to this.

13:9 Rejoicing

In most of chapter 13 Paul does what he can to insure that when he visits Corinth his hopes will be realized rather than his fears. At the end of chapter 12 he is afraid he may mourn over those who have not repented of their previous immorality. Towards the end of chapter 13 his emotions seem to have made a complete U-turn: *For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong; this we also pray for, that you be made complete* (v. 9). How, in the space of a few verses, is Paul able to transition from the fear he may be mourning to the emotion of rejoicing? Why the change?

In 13:1-10 Paul threatens strong action during his third visit. He will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others (v. 2), nor will he hesitate to use the full force of his apostolic authority (v. 10).⁸⁴ Precisely what that might look like he does not say, but in this passage he clearly strikes a strong note of warning. If they want proof of his apostolic authority they will get it (v. 3)!⁸⁵ At the same time he urges them to test themselves to see whether they are in the faith (v. 5). Confident that they will indeed heed his warning and pass the test, he dares to rejoice in his own weakness and in their strength (v. 9). Paul is again making use of the power-in-weakness paradox that dominates these chapters. But this paradox is a flexible concept that has a certain degree of semantic fluidity. As Hughes explains:

It will be a matter of rejoicing to Paul, therefore, if the state of the church when he arrives in Corinth is such that he may be “weak”, that is, under no necessity to enforce authority; for this will mean that the Corinthians are “powerful” – not merely in the sense that they give evidence of spiritual power (though this is inevitably involved), but more precisely in the sense that they have disciplined themselves, and thus obviated the necessity for him to come to them with a rod.⁸⁶

Paul is therefore able to invest the prevailing paradox with fresh meaning or at the very least apply it in a new way. He is weak when he does not need to exercise apostolic discipline; they are strong when they discipline themselves. They are strong when they “do no wrong . . . but do what is right” (v. 7), i.e. when they have fully repented of their previous sins (12:20-21). If that is how the strength/weakness paradox works itself out on his next visit to Corinth, Paul will have every reason to rejoice.⁸⁷ It is yet another demonstration of how the overarching paradox of the death and resurrection of Jesus (v. 4) comes to expression in Paul’s apostolic ministry. Just as the crucified Jesus became the risen Jesus, so the Paul who was afraid (12:20-21) becomes the Paul who rejoices (13:9). Paul’s emotions end on a high note as the epistle draws to a close.⁸⁸

Conclusion

Thanks to Paul speaking so freely to them and opening his heart wide to the Corinthians (6:11), we have a fuller description of his emotions in this epistle than anywhere else in the New Testament. In fact, largely due to this epistle Paul is the most well developed and “rounded” character on its pages, second possibly only to Jesus himself. Because of

⁸⁴ Thompson, “Paul’s Argument from *Pathos* in 2 Corinthians,” 141, elaborates: “In contrast to the earlier occasion when Paul refrained from visiting the Corinthians in order to spare them (1:23), on the next visit he will not spare his opposition. He writes in order that, on his next visit, he will not need to act severely in exercising his apostolic authority (13:10).”

⁸⁵ Thus Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 277.

⁸⁶ Hughes, *2 Corinthians*, 483.

⁸⁷ Cf. the description of joy in the Pauline corpus offered by Stephen C. Barton, *Joy in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2013), 20: “It is an individual and social manifestation of *things that matter most*. In Paul, that has to do with the progress of the eschatological gospel of Christ and the progress in faith of those who have come to acknowledge Christ as merciful Lord” (italics his).

⁸⁸ Despite its emotional intensity 2 Corinthians is punctuated by notes of joy. Although references to Paul’s rejoicing are dotted throughout the epistle, it is probably significant that both its major sections end with an emphasis on his joy (cf. 7:4, 7, 9, 13, 16).

his strained relationship with the church at Corinth we see a range of his emotions surface here that far surpasses that found in any other epistle. Because of his candid self-disclosure his despair, joy, gladness, anguish, tears, love, perplexity, groaning, regrets, jealousy, distress and fear are plain for all to see.

For any minister of the gospel for whom pastor-church relationships have become complicated 2 Corinthians therefore has the potential of being a source of great reassurance. Any struggling pastor will readily identify with Paul's emotions as he deals with what appear to be intransigent pastoral problems. In the course of this epistle Paul also provides a model for ministry that should serve as a paradigm for pastors today. Contemporary ministry, for all its complexities, must still reflect both the death and resurrection of Jesus.

That this should be so comes from Paul's indications of what a new covenant ministry looks like. Throughout the epistle, interwoven with his pastoral concerns, is Paul's most detailed apologetic of his apostolic ministry. Particularly in the vicissitudes of his dealings with the Corinthians Paul's ministry reflects the messianic ministry of Jesus. As we have seen, his ministry among them has been driven by several basic paradoxes – comfort through despair (1:3-11), joy through sorrow (1:12-2:13; 7:5-16), glory through shame (2:14-7:4), generosity through poverty (8:1-9:15) and strength through weakness (10:1-13:10). Underlying these various paradoxes is the paradigmatic life-through-death paradox provided by the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. All the other paradoxes cohere around this central paradox. Paul's emotions clearly fit this pattern. The first of Paul's emotions the epistle mentions is despair (1:8) and the last is joy (13:9). Between these two there are several highs and lows related particularly to the reception of the severe letter (chapters 2-7) and the Corinthians' welcome of the intruders (chapters 10-13). Had it not been for Paul's earlier painful visit to Corinth and the subsequent arrival of the "super-apostles" we may never have come to know him as well as we do now. Because of the self-revealing ways he dealt with these difficulties he cuts a compelling and sympathetic figure.