

THE SECOND EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS

perdition" (Phil 3:18-19²³). So too, here, those who mask the true righteousness of God in the crucified One (5:21), peddling instead a Torah-righteousness that brings only condemnation (2:17; 3:9), face the same dreadful "end." Perhaps Paul implies a pointedly deeper meaning here.²⁴ As "ministers of righteousness," they have preached "the law" and, therefore, "its works" (cf. Gal 3:10-14); their end — perdition — issues from their "works," that is, their "works"-righteousness.

Here, then, Paul sets forth a clear warning to those engaged in ministry, especially missionaries and church pastors. The righteousness of God is located only in the vicarious death of Christ and not in the works of the Law. Those who preach and teach must direct their hearers to the message of the cross so that no one is in doubt as to the means of divine acceptance. Let those who preach otherwise take note of the consequences set forth here by the apostle.

(5) A Fool Boasts (11:16-21a)

16 I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then receive me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting. 17 In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool. 18 Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast. 19 You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! 20 In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face. 21 To my shame I admit that we were too weak for that!

Having directed such strong attention to the "false apostles" (vv. 13-15), Paul now moves to the subtle triangular interplay between them ("anyone" — vv. 16, 20; "many" — v. 18; "fools" — v. 19), the Corinthians ("you" — vv. 16, 19, 20), and himself ("me" — v. 16; "I" — vv. 17, 18, 21a; "we" — v. 21a). He does so by picking up the "fool" theme from v. 1. Paul tells the Corinthians not to take him for a "fool." Nonetheless, if they prefer to do so, let them receive him just as they would any "fool," so that he, *too*, can "boast" (v. 16), a reference back to the "false apostles" (vv. 13-15) who are characterized by "boasting" (10:12-13).

What proceeds now is full of biting irony. Since "boasting" is what "fools" do, we are meant to infer that Paul is imitating and parodying these men as "fools." Yet — let the Corinthians understand — he is not speaking "according to the Lord," but "as in foolishness," in this mode of "boasting" (i.e., as the

23. Cf. Rom 3:8; 2 Tim 4:14.

24. So Hughes, 396.

“false apostles” are doing — v. 17; cf. 10:12-13, 17-18). Since they are “boasting according to the flesh,” so, “too,” Paul will “boast” (v. 18).

Having asked them to “receive” him “as a fool” (v. 16), Paul comments ironically that the Corinthians, being so “wise,” gladly “bear with fools” — that is, himself, but also the “false apostles” (see v. 20). Again, ironically, he notes that the Corinthians “bear with” those who exploit and abuse them (v. 20). The Corinthians, too, must be “fools” to put up with that! He rounds off the passage with an expression of irony tinged with pain, “to my shame, we were too weak for that” (i.e., to exploit and abuse others — v. 21).

This is, indeed, the language of pain. If he speaks as “a fool” or as “weak,” it is because, in all probability, some at Corinth — probably the newcomers (“anyone” — v. 16; cf. “anyone” — v. 20) — have spoken of him in those ways. If he “boasts,” it is because others — almost certainly the newcomers — are “boasting” of their achievements, while comparing Paul disadvantageously with themselves (see on 10:12-13). But Paul’s irony is biting; the Corinthians, too, will feel pain at his words.

Here we see, even at this distance in time, the suffering of a minister of the gospel, the founder of a church, whom that church is perilously close to rejecting in favor of other teachers who claimed to be superior but whose doctrines are capable of corrupting the church. Although the rhetorical terms in which Paul expresses himself are strange to us today, they would have provoked considerable comment in his day. The “Fool’s Speech,” as it will develop, is, in fact, a daring countercultural exercise. At that time one boasted of achievements, not of weaknesses.

16 Paul now picks up again the threads of his “Fool’s Speech” introduced in v. 1 (“I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool”; cf. v. 1 — “my foolishness”), a “speech” that will itself begin in v. 21b.

The words “fool” (vv. 17, 18, 21; 12:6, 11) and “madman” (v. 23 — RSV),¹ are very important in the extended passage 11:16–12:13. But who is calling Paul a “fool”? His injunction, “Let not *anyone* regard me as a fool,” points to the “false apostles” as his accusers; in v. 20 the fivefold “anyone” is in clear reference to them.

But this leads on to something else. In the first half of a second sentence he adds, ironically, “Otherwise, if you must”² — that is, *you Corinthians* — take me for a “fool,” then “receive me as you would any ‘fool.’” The

1. In 1 Corinthians a member of the ἄφρων-ἄφροσύνη word group appears only once (1 Cor 15:36), whereas μωρός-μωρία appears repeatedly there but not in 2 Corinthians. The appearance of ἄφρων-ἄφροσύνη in 2 Corinthians suggests that these words are current as criticisms of Paul in Corinth.

2. Gk. εἰ δὲ μή γε (NIV, “but if you do”) is found only here in Paul, but is common in Luke.

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Corinthians have "borne with" those who have preached "another Jesus" (v. 4); let them "receive" (and "bear with" — v. 1) the "fool," Paul. This is for the purpose stated in the second part of that sentence, namely, "that"³ he, "too,"⁴ can "do a little boasting."⁵

If there are others who "boast" — who likewise must be "fools" — then Paul, too, will "boast." By accepting their tag "fool" in the way he has, Paul has at the same time pinned it on those who call him "fool." By boasting — though of an inverted, mocking kind — he will show who is really foolish. In the speech following he will boast like other fools to show how foolish those who call him foolish are.

17 He hastens to correct any possible misunderstanding. Let them not think he is "speaking according to the Lord."⁶ No, this is another way of speaking — not an apostle's way, but a "fool's" way. If they call him a fool, let them hear what a fool has to say.

Nor is it merely "boasting"; it is "boasting" in a "self-confident"⁷ way, which, as v. 18 goes on to say, is "boasting according to the flesh."

v. 17 What I speak

I speak not according to the Lord
but as in foolishness,
in this self-confident boasting.

v. 18

Since many are
boasting
according to the flesh. . . .

For the sake of this rhetorical exercise Paul casts himself in the role of his opponents. What they do he will do. If they "boast in . . . self-confidence, in the flesh," then so, too, will he. "But," he declares, it is "as in foolishness."⁸ This is a two-edged comment. It is "foolish" for him; but since he is playing *their* part, it is "foolish" for them, too. By his parody Paul reveals their "foolishness" while at the same time positively expounding the authentic "foolishness" of God's ways, which he, Paul, is following.

3. Gk. ἵνα.

4. Gk. ἐγώ, "I, too"; Paul did not start this foolish boasting.

5. Paul has already declared that "only in the Lord" may one "boast" (10:17-18). He will boast only "a little," presumably in contrast with the newcomers, whose boasting is extensive and the basis of their acceptance in Corinth.

6. Gk. οὐ κατὰ κύριον λαλῶ; NIV, "not talking as the Lord would"; RSV: "not with the Lord's authority" (cf. 1 Cor 7:10; 9:8).

7. Gk. ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ὑποστάσει, which Furnish, 496, representing many, takes to mean "in this matter" or "project." NIV's "self-confident," which is followed here, fits well the flow of the text.

8. Gk. ὡς ἐν ἀφροσύνῃ; NIV, "as a fool."

What others — Paul's opponents — "boast" of, and their "self-confidence" in doing so, is open to question (but see on v. 18). But — by implication — Paul's "boasting" is securely based in reality. By exposing their "foolishness" in such self-confident boasting, let them see his sanity.

18 Since "many," indeed, do "boast according to the flesh,"⁹ so, too, will Paul. It is probable that the apostle is here pointing to the "many" newcomers (cf. "so many" — 2:17; "some" — 3:1; "some . . . they" — 10:12) and their "boasting." He may be thinking of their distinctive route to "righteousness" (v. 15) by means of the moral and ceremonial observances of the Mosaic dispensation (see on v. 15), which would be a ground for "boasting" (cf. Rom 3:27; Eph 2:9). On the other hand — and this would not exclude the previous consideration — he may be referring to their "boasting" in regard to the elements of ministry in which they regard themselves as "superior" to Paul as they "classify and compare" themselves with him (see on 10:12; 11:5).¹⁰

Now it is precisely because these people "boast" — for the reasons suggested — that Paul, too, "boasts." Because they "boast," he "must boast" (11:30; 12:1). Such "boasting" is, of course, "foolish" (see on v. 16). Their "foolishness" in "boasting" has "forced" Paul also "to be a fool" (12:11), forced him "to boast" (11:30; 12:1).

If such people can boast "according to the flesh," so, too, can Paul (cf. "For if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool" — 12:6). But his "fleshly" boasting will take a surprising turn; it will be of his "weakness[es]" (see on 11:30; 12:9).

19 The connective "For"¹¹ introduces the basis — delayed by some verses — on which he has made the original statement (v. 16). "Receive me as a fool," he says, "for you gladly¹² put up with¹³ fools." "Put up with" (vv. 1, 4, 20), along with the "fool" vocabulary (v. 1), again picks up the threads of the "Fool's Speech" introduced earlier (v. 16; cf. v. 1).

9. Gk. πολλοὶ καυχῶνται κατὰ σάρκα is taken by the NIV (also the RSV) — unhelpfully — as "in the way the world does." A better rendering would be: "according to the flesh" since this brings out the notion of self-effort, as opposed to the empowering Spirit of the new covenant in the day of salvation (1:17; 5:16; 10:2, 3). Κατὰ σάρκα is to be preferred to κατὰ τὴν σάρκα. Both have equal textual support, but the latter would convey the improbable meaning: "from their human point of view."

10. Possibly, too, they were boasting of the one — Cephas? — who, in their opinion, staked the claim on their behalf for their mission in Corinth (see on 10:16).

11. Gk. γάρ.

12. Gk. ἡδέως, which comes first for emphasis. The adverb καλῶς, "easily," is used with this verb in 11:4.

13. Gk. ἀνέχεσθε, "you put up with, bear with," is one of the keywords of this passage, used with irony and pain (11:1, 4, 20).

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On the face of it he is speaking of himself, as indeed he is, but with irony. The "Fool's Speech," especially as it intensifies in 11:21b-12:13, is focused on the "foolishness," even "madness," of the apostolic life. Yes, he is the "fool" (i.e., "the unwise"), whom these "wise,"¹⁴ these theologically gifted Corinthians (8:7; cf. 1 Cor 4:10; 10:15), "put up with."

But are these who "put up with" the "unwise" Paul "wise" in fact? By a subtle twist Paul proceeds to say that they — the "wise" Corinthians — "put up with" dreadful abuse (v. 20). So are they not "unwise," "fools"?

20 With one more explanatory "For,"¹⁵ Paul introduces the climax of vv. 16-21a. Once more Paul uses the keyword "put up with," which, as we have seen, is capable of several nuances (see on vv. 1, 4, 19). The Corinthians are the subject of the verb "put up with," and the object, understood, is "it."¹⁶ When, however, he lists five situations in which the Corinthians ("you") are the object of abusive behavior by "anyone," it is clear that the "false apostles" are the subject and the Corinthians the object of their actions.

Instead of "putting up with" a "fool" like Paul, he cleverly reverses the object. The Corinthians themselves are "fools" who put up with (it) when the newcomers inflict indignities on them.

Again, he speaks of the newcomers (i.e., plural, as in 10:12; 11:5, 12, 13, 15, 18) in the singular, and in an impersonal manner "anyone" (so also 10:16, 18; 11:4). Five times he uses the rhetorical "if anyone."¹⁷ Now follow the five evil actions¹⁸ of the newcomers that the "foolish" Corinthians have "put up with." The intruders "enslave" the Corinthians, that is, subject them to the kind of domineering leadership Paul himself was careful not to impose (cf. 1:24; 12:14; cf. 4:5). Second, they "exploit" them, or, more literally, "devour"¹⁹ them, a probable reference to securing financial support from the Corinthians. Third, the newcomers "take advantage of" them, in all probability amplifying the first action, "enslave." This speaks of exerting complete control over the Corinthians. The word "catch"²⁰ is sometimes used of snaring a bird or catching

14. The combination here of ἀφρόνων and φρόνιμοι adds to the rhetorical impact. The ironic "foolish"/"wise" contrast between himself and them is found also in 1 Corinthians, except that a different word for foolishness is used there: ἡμεῖς μωροὶ . . . ὑμεῖς φρόνιμοι (1 Cor 4:10).

15. Gk. γάρ.

16. For a parallel see Josephus, "When plundered, you put up with it (ἀνέχεσθε), when beaten you are silent . . ." (J.W. 4.165).

17. Gk. εἴ τις.

18. Gk. καταδουλοῖ . . . κατεσθίει . . . λαμβάνει . . . ἐπαίρεται . . . δέρει. . . . The first two verbs are compounded, signifying intensified meaning.

19. Gk. κατεσθίει. Cf. "The scribes . . . who devour (κατεσθίοντες) widows' houses" (Mark 12:40).

20. Gk. λαμβάνει.

fish (cf. 12:16; Luke 5:5). Fourth, they “push themselves forward,” again, more literally, “lift themselves up” in a superior way (cf. 10:5). Fifth, these men “have slapped [the Corinthians] in the face.” While many commentators regard this as metaphorical for “humiliate,”²¹ it may point more literally to some physical violence against the Corinthians.²² Of the five actions listed, this alone is specific in character, adding weight to the possibility that Paul is referring to a well-known incident in Corinth in the recent past.

Whatever the exact meaning of these five elements they represent the antithesis of the godly minister of the new covenant modeled on the “meekness and gentleness of Christ” (10:1). Such a minister gives himself to and for the people — as Christ did — in a spirit of self-sacrifice. The contrast is the more pointed because Paul will immediately relate how he has fulfilled such a ministry, and at considerable personal cost (11:21–12:13). This evil description serves as a dark backdrop against which the bright goodness of Paul’s own ministry may be seen. The exploitative and manipulative actions listed here have become all too familiar in the treatment by leaders of both adults and children in a number of highly publicized modern cults.

Paul’s subtle use of “foolish” (i.e., “unwise”) and “wise” in vv. 16–20 should be noted as applying (1) to his opponents, who, because they “boast,” show themselves to be “fools” (v. 16), whom the Corinthians also “put up with” (v. 19); (2) to Paul, who, because he, “too,” “boasts,” shows himself to be a “fool” (v. 16), and whom the Corinthians “put up with”; and (3) to the “wise” Corinthians, who are “fools” to “put up with” the “fools” who misuse them (v. 20).

21a Paul’s irony now reaches its most biting expression. If the opponents say²³ he is “weak,” as apparently they do (see on 10:1), let them know that it is just as they say: “we are [too] weak²⁴ [for that].” That is, he was too weak to treat the Corinthians as the newcomers have (v. 20). It is “to [his] shame”²⁵ to admit it, but he does.

This ironical admission of “weakness” signals the introduction proper of the “Fool’s Speech” in the next verse, reaching its climax in the famous “power-in-weakness” passage (12:7–10). The vocabulary of “weak-

21. So Furnish, 497, citing others.

22. Both Christ and Paul were struck in the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:65; Acts 23:2). Paul exhorts that a bishop/elder should not be violent (1 Tim 3:3; Tit 1:7).

23. The phrase *ὡς ὅτι* introduces a quotation (of theirs!), as in 5:19. Furnish, 497, however, thinks that *ὡς* is Paul’s ironic judgment whereas *ὅτι* is dependent on *λέγω*.

24. Gk. *ἡμεῖς ἡσθενήκαμεν*. Note that (1) *ἡμεῖς* is emphatic and contrastive with the false apostles in v. 20, (2) something (e.g., “for that”) has to be supplied to give the sense, and (3) the perfect tense indicates “we were and are weak.”

25. Gk. *κατὰ ἀτιμίαν λέγω*, lit. “I speak with respect to shame. . . .” Clearly, Paul is speaking about himself.

ness[es],”²⁶ which has been employed only once to this point in the letter (10:10), will be used constantly from this point to the end of the “Fool’s Speech” (11:21b–12:13). Because “many” have “boasted” (11:18), Paul, too, “must boast” (11:30; 12:1), but it will be in his “weakness” (11:30; 12:9); hence the importance of the introduction here of the vocabulary of “weakness.” He has been forced to be a “fool” (12:11; cf. 11:16).

b. The “Fool’s Speech” Proper (11:21b–12:10)

It is probable that this “Speech” mirrors, but so as to parody and also correct, the claims of the newly arrived false apostles. From what appear to be his responses to them, his opponents “boasted of”: (1) their Jewish heritage (11:22), (2) their accomplishments that accredited them as ministers of Christ (11:23), and (3) extraordinary “visions and revelations” (12:1–4). It is quite likely that they pointed to Paul’s evident misfortunes and humiliations in the pursuit of his ministry as signs of inferiority and incompetence. Paul will not attempt to match them in their favorable comparisons of themselves with him. Rather, he will daringly boast of “weaknesses,” the very weaknesses they deplore, so as to mock his opponents’ crassness in boasting while at the same time establishing that it is *his* ministry that authentically replicates the suffering ministry of Christ. The true trajectory of Christ’s ministry is to be seen as continued in Paul and his ministry and not in the ministry of these men.

In the “Fool’s Speech” proper Paul (1) exposes the triumphalism of the “false apostles,” whose keyword is *hyper* (they have “more” to offer than Paul, whom they are “above,” or “better” than), but also (2) “boasts” of his “weaknesses,” that is, of those sufferings incurred in the course of ministry in replication of the sufferings of Christ. This is Paul’s “foolishness,” his “madness,” which is the “foolishness” and “madness” of Christ himself. As such this part of the “Speech” is profoundly antitriumphalist and must be read with the antitriumphalism of the striking prisoner-of-war image at the beginning of the excursus on new covenant ministry (see on 2:14).

(1) Comparison: The Opponents and Paul (11:21b–23a)

21b *What anyone else dares to boast about — I am speaking as a fool — I also dare to boast about.* 22 *Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I.* 23 *Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more.*

26. Gk. ἰσθενεῖν also occurs in 11:29; 12:10; 13:3, 4, 9; ἰσθενεῖα in 11:30; 12:5, 9, 10; 13:4; and ἰσθενής in 10:10.

This "speech" is Paul's "daring" (v. 21b) reply to the apparent jibes that he is "weak" and a "fool," as contrasted with them, who are strong and wise! So, remarkably, he not only accepts their labels but expands and elaborates upon them in an astonishing catalogue of "weaknesses" and "foolishnesses."

This, however, is not merely an ingenious disarming rhetorical device. Profound theology lies at its base. Such weaknesses and foolishnesses demonstrated in suffering in gospel ministry reveal him to be a genuine minister of Christ ("a *better* [minister] of Christ" — 11:23) and, indeed, to be identified with Christ, who was "crucified" in weakness (13:4). If Christ is seen most definitively in his suffering on the cross, then his minister is seen most definitively in foolish weakness, not in power. In these sufferings Paul had identified with the weak as no one else had. Grimly he will ask, "Who is weak and I am not weak"? (11:29, RSV). But, then, he is able to go on, climactically, to share his experience of the power of God resting on him in his most profound experience of weakness, the "stake/thorn" (12:8; cf. 13:4).

Thus the "Speech" proper has elements of antitriumphalism as well as of triumph, characteristics that inexactly replicate those in the remarkable victory parade metaphor set out in 2:14.

21b In this brief sentence Paul begins the "Fool's Speech" proper. It is cast in the first person singular ("I"/"me"), unlike much of the first nine chapters of this letter, which is in the first person plural ("we"/"us"). The first two verses establish this intensely personal presentation by his fourfold "I also"¹ (vv. 21b-22):

In whatever anyone is bold
— I am speaking in foolishness —
I also am bold.

Paul's vocabulary — "boldness" and "foolishness"² — appears to echo a polemic against him in Corinth — the former from the Corinthians (see 10:2), the latter from the "false apostles" (see on v. 16). His own manner of life and speech as a man "in Christ" is disciplined, circumscribed by the "meekness and gentleness of Christ" (10:1, RSV). This, however, together with his well-known sufferings, appears to have led to the interpretation of him as "weak"³ (i.e., lacking "boldness") and "foolish," suggestive of slogans used against him.

His assertion "I am bold" — in the face of whatever it is that "anyone is bold" [about] — takes us back to a denial made earlier, "Not that we are

1. Gk. καὶ ἐγώ = καὶ ἐγώ, an example of crasis, lit. "and I am."

2. Cf. Gk. τολμᾶν (NIV, "dare" — 10:2, 12); ἀφοροσύνη (NIV, "foolishness" — 11:1, 17); ἄφρων (NIV, "Fool" — 11:16 [twice], 19; 12:6, 11); παραφρονεῖν ("NIV, "out of my mind" — 11:23).

3. See 10:10; 11:19, 30.

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bold to class or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves" (see on 10:12). In spite of that denial, in the catalogue following (11:22–12:10), he is indeed bold "to class and compare" himself with those who deem themselves "superior" to (*hyper* — lit. "over" — see on 11:5) him. But his comparisons, unlike theirs, are a tragic-comic parody of self-commendation, Paul's "fool-speak." So far from listing achievements that might commend and legitimate him as a minister of Christ, as the newcomers apparently have, he lists his sufferings and humiliations.

Who are these persons? Based on information scattered throughout the previous chapters, it appears they are the "self-commended" ones (10:12, 18), the "superlative" apostles (11:5), who have "come" to Corinth preaching "another Jesus . . . a different gospel" (11:4), those "false apostles" who as "ministers of Satan" have "fashioned themselves as ministers of righteousness" (11:13–15) and who have captured and abused the Corinthians (11:20). But in the next verses Paul will supply the piece of the jigsaw that, more than any other to this point in the letter, will assist in establishing the profile of these opponents.

22, 23a These verses are critical in the exposition of Paul's "Fool's Speech" (11:21b–12:13). By means of these four rhetorical questions he "classes and compares" himself with the "false apostles" (see on v. 21b; cf. 10:12).

Hebrews	are they?	So am I.
Israelites	are they?	So am I.
Seed of Abraham	are they?	So am I.
Ministers of Christ	are they?	I am better.

This fourfold "comparison"⁴ (see on 10:12) yields critical data as to (1) the identity and (2) the mission of these newly arrived opponents of the apostle. By *identity* these men are "Hebrews"⁵ and "Israelites,"⁶ pure members of

4. Paul's comparisons ("So am I . . . I am better") appear to follow the Hellenistic σύγκρισις that appealed to "good breeding" (εὐγενεῖα), as seen, e.g., from a contemporary inscription to one Tiberius Claudius Zopas by his son as "son of his city, lover of his country, both on account of the gravity of his manners and of his *good breeding* (he inherits) from his ancestors" (cited in E. A. Judge, "St Paul and Classical Society," 9–36).

5. Gk. Ἑβραῖοι. Paul's self-description "Hebrew" here and at Phil 3:5 implies race. Eusebius describes Philo, the aristocratic Alexandrian Jew contemporary of Paul, as "descended from Hebrew stock" (*Hist. Eccl.* 2.4.2). By contrast Luke's reference (Acts 6:1) — the only other reference in the NT — implies language. In terms of Acts 6 we should probably think of the pre-Christian Paul as Ἑλληνίστης, a rabbi teaching the Greek-speaking synagogues in Jerusalem. (See M. Hengel, *Pre-Christian Paul*, 54–61.) Quite possibly these "Hebrews" who have now come to Corinth were drawn from the same "Hellenist" group as Paul, who first bitterly opposed Stephen and then Paul himself (cf. Acts 6:9–11; 9:29).

6. Gk. Ἰσραηλῖται, one who belongs to the people of Israel. Note the more Semitic

that race descended from its patriarchal fountainhead, Abraham,⁷ whose "seed"⁸ they are.⁹ Of such persons (of "the people of Israel") he writes elsewhere,

Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ. (Rom 9:4-5)

These men — like Paul — belong to God's unique people, whom he chose and redeemed, with whom he made covenant, to whom he sent his prophets, and from whom the Messiah would come.¹⁰ They are clearly Jews.

The designation "Hebrews," as contrasted with "Hellenists" in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 6:1), is usually taken to imply people of Aramaic speech.¹¹ Does Paul's present racial reference "Hebrews" (cf. Phil 3:5) also carry that linguistic import here? To the contrary, that these "Hebrews . . . Israelites" have come to Corinth, a Greco-Roman metropolis, makes it almost certain that they were Greek-speaking, as Paul was, even though he, too, was "of the people of Israel . . . a Hebrew" (Phil 3:5). For them, a significant level of competence in the Greek language is implied.¹² Paul will not concede inferiority to these men in the fundamentals of apostleship, but he does in speech (11:5-6; cf. 10:10).

So these men are Jews, Greek-speaking Jews, who have "come" (see on 10:13-15; 11:4), bearing "letters of commendation" (3:1), to Corinth. But what was their purpose, their *mission*? Paul's question, "Ministers of Christ"¹³

term υἱοὶ Ἰσραὴλ in 3:7, 13. The speeches of both Peter and Paul to Jewish audiences, as recorded in the Acts, are addressed to, "Men, *Israelites* . . ." (Acts 2:22; 3:12; 5:35; 13:16; 21:28).

7. Rom 11:1; Matt 1:1-2, 17; 3:9; 22:32; Luke 1:55, 73; 19:9; John 8:33, 37, 39, 53, 56; cf. Gen 12:2-3; Isa 51:1-2.

8. Gk. σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ, (NIV, "Abraham's descendants") is hardly distinguishable from Ἰσραηλῖται (see Rom 11:1; 4 Macc 18:1).

9. Paul's "comparison" with these persons in this verse must be interpreted by his outright statements about himself in (1) Phil 3:5, where as a "Hebrew" he is "of Hebrews" (Ἑβραῖος ἐξ Ἑβραίων), i.e., by physical descent (cf. John 1:12 — "born of bloods") and "by race, Israel" (ἐκ γένους Ἰσραὴλ), and in (2) Rom 11:1, where he declares himself to be "an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham" (ἐγὼ Ἰσραηλῖτης εἰμὶ, ἐκ σπέρματος Ἀβραάμ). Martin's suggestion, 374, that "Hebrews . . . Israelites . . . Seed of Abraham" marks these men out as Jewish *Christians* is unlikely; this verse, along with Phil 3:5; Rom 11:1, is a reference to Jewishness, pure and simple.

10. See on 2:17-3:3.

11. So M. Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, 1-29.

12. So M. Hengel, *Pre-Christian Paul*, 60.

13. "Ministers of Christ" should be set alongside a later reference to those who

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are they?" when read alongside "such men are false apostles . . . fashioning themselves as apostles of Christ" (see on v. 13), supplies the answer. These men come on a "Christian" mission; their representation of themselves, apparently, was as "ministers of Christ." But Paul saw them as "*pseudo*," as "*false* apostles . . . ministers of [Satan]" (v. 13) and as "*false* brothers" who put his life in danger (see on v. 26).

Thus from the data scattered throughout this letter it emerges that these opponents of Paul who have come to Corinth are Jewish Christian — from their point of view, if not from Paul's — "ministers." What was their mission, their "ministry"? A few verses earlier Paul called them "ministers of righteousness." When read with the contrast between the "ministries" (*diakoniai*¹⁴) of the "old covenant" (i.e., of Moses) and the "new covenant" (i.e., of righteousness and the Spirit), this suggests that their purpose in coming to Corinth was to "minister" that "righteousness" associated with Moses/the Law ("on tablets of stone . . . the letter" — 3:3, 6), as opposed to that "righteousness" issuing in "reconciliation with God" based on Christ's death (3:9; 5:21), which was the "ministry" of Paul (3:6; cf. 2:17–3:4; 5:18, 19, 20).

Paul does not here deny outright that they are "ministers of Christ";¹⁵ rather, he claims to be "better," which he proceeds to argue by the catalogue of his greater sufferings in the "Fool's Speech" following. Indeed, his "I am better"¹⁶ controls the list of weaknesses following, including the climax, the "thorn in the flesh" (12:9).

It is noteworthy that while he condemns them as "false apostles, evil workmen . . . ministers [of Satan]" a few verses earlier (11:13–15), in this verse he calls them "ministers of Christ." What is the explanation of this apparent contradiction?

"preach Christ . . . proclaim Christ," yet who did so out of malice to Paul (Phil 1:15, 17) and who advocated the circumcision of Gentiles (Phil 3:2). Paul uses their high qualifications within Judaism as a comparative basis for his own standing as "a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to Law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church" (Phil 3:5–6). Do the references in Philippians indicate a deepening of enmity toward Paul from this quarter?

14. Gk. *διακόνια*. See 3:3, 7, 8, 9.

15. Gk. *διάκονοι Χριστοῦ* (NIV, "servants of Christ"), the only parallel to which in the NT is Col 1:7 — *Ἐπαφρᾶ . . . διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ*. But see 2 Cor 6:4 — "ministers of God."

16. Gk. *ὤπερ ἐγώ*; NIV, "I am more." An elliptical phrase, which stated fully could be (1) a comparative — "I [am] even more [a minister of Christ]," or (2) a superlative, "I [am] the very best [minister of Christ]." Given the comparatives in v. 23, option (1) is preferred. Paul's reference to *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* (11:5; 12:11) is ironic; only they say they are "superlative." According to Hughes, 405 n. 71, this is the only use of *ὤπερ* as an adverb in the NT.

Two comments are offered. First, from their viewpoint they were "ministers of Christ." They presented themselves as "apostles of Christ" (v. 13), "preaching Jesus . . . a gospel" (11:4), and they came bearing "letters of recommendation" (presumably) from Christians elsewhere. Yet from Paul's perspective as a pioneer minister of the new covenant theirs was "*another* Jesus . . . a *different* gospel," belonging to a now-superseded dispensation (see on 3:6-11). The content of their doctrine found no approval in Paul's eyes.

Second, their self-presentation was triumphalist (see on 2:14), the foil for which was Paul himself in his "foolishness" and "weakness." They sought to legitimate their ministry by comparing themselves with Paul, pointing to their superiority and his inferiority. Paul, however, by implication, sees his ministry in its sufferings as an authentic extension of the sufferings of the crucified One. Hence his weaknesses, as listed in the passage following, point to his "superiority" as a "minister of Christ," that is, the Christ who was "meek and gentle" (10:1), and who was crucified (13:3). Quite possibly the sufferings incurred in his own ministry as set forth in the "speech" as it unfolds were, in themselves, sufficient to discredit the ministry of these triumphalists without further comment.¹⁷

(2) Paul's Catalogue of Weaknesses (11:23b-33)

23b *I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.*
 24 *Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.*
 25 *Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,* 26 *I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.* 27 *I have labored and toiled¹ and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.* 28 *Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all*

17. Paul's advantageous contrast of the new covenant with the old served effectively to invalidate and thus overturn the latter, though not in as many words. It should be noted that the vocabulary of comparison used there appears here also — *μᾶλλον* (3:8; 12:9); *περισσεύειν* (3:9), *περισσότερος* (11:23); *ὑπερβάλλειν* (3:10); and *ὑπερβαλλόντως* (11:23).

1. The MSS are divided over the inclusion/exclusion of *ἐν* with the datives *κόπῳ* . . . *μόχθῳ*. Because of the probability that *ἐν* was added to match the remainder of the verse, exclusion is preferable.

the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.
31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. 32 In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me.²
33 But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

Paul's catalogue of his sufferings,³ many of them related directly or indirectly to his travels,⁴ is his daring response to the intruders' "classification and comparison" (cf. 10:12) of themselves as superior (*hyper*) to him. Such greater sufferings are not sufferings per se; they arise directly from the foolishness/madness of Paul's missionary travels and accompanying labors. Above all, he is impacted daily by the pressure of anxiety from the churches.

The exposition of his "weaknesses" set forth here should be read with "God, who leads us in triumph in Christ" in the stunning metaphor of the Roman military triumph (see on 2:14). The details of his sufferings in the "Fool's Speech" proper (11:23b-12:10) serve as commentary on that metaphor.

This list of Paul's sufferings, extensive though it is, represents only part of Paul's total story. It tells us nothing of Paul before he was a Christian. Insofar as the Acts of the Apostles relates to Paul's life as "a man in Christ," from the time of his call/conversion to the time of writing 2 Cor 11:23a-12:9 (i.e., Acts 8:1-20:1), a span of only twenty-five years is represented. Moreover, there would have been much more to Paul's life than even the amalgamation of details from his letters and the Acts would suggest.

23b Paul's elaboration of his "foolishness" (v. 21b) now begins as he "class[es] . . . compare[s] . . . measures" his ministry with that of his opponents (see on 10:12-13; v. 21a). Contrast with these "ministers of Christ" (v. 23a) is implied by the comparative "more abundantly"⁵ used with "labors" and "imprisonments," by the comparative "surpassingly"⁶ used

2. The insertion of θέλων, either before or following πιάσαι με, is explained as for stylistic improvement.

3. Technically known as περίστασεις, as found in Cynic-Stoic authors (see Martin, 160-61). Paul, however, does not use this word. See generally the major study J. T. Fitzgerald, *Earthen Vessels*, which, however, does not deal with the *peristasis* following. For an elaborate analysis of the structure of vv. 21-29, see Martin, 368-72.

4. See *New Docs.* 3.58-59 for examples of risks associated with travel and the practice of giving thanks to the gods for safe arrival.

5. Gk. περισσοτέρως; NIV, "much harder . . . more frequently."

6. Gk. ὑπερβαλλόντως; NIV, "more severely."

with "floggings," and by the adverb "frequently"⁷ with "[exposed to] death."⁸

This list of four sufferings — "labors . . . imprisonments . . . floggings . . . [exposed to] death" — summarizes in advance the matters on which he will elaborate.⁹ Thus he picks up "labors" in v. 27a (see on 6:5), "imprisonments" (by inference) and "floggings" in vv. 24-25a (see on 6:5), and "[exposure to] death" in vv. 24b-26. Whether on the road traveling from place to place or operating from a particular base of ministry, Paul faced suffering and danger to a greater degree, by implication, than those interlopers who have encroached into his "field" of ministry and taken advantage of his "labors" (see on 10:14-15). That they have come a considerable distance may not be denied, but at nothing like the personal cost incurred by the apostle.

It is significant that "labors" is the first-mentioned suffering (cf. v. 27). "Labors" were necessary because Paul steadfastly refused payment from the churches, offering the gospel freely (see on v. 7). This was the badge of his apostolate to the Gentiles as exercised, for example, in Achaia, which the intruders — because they accepted payment — could not wear (see on vv. 10, 12, 20). There is little doubt that had Paul accepted the patronage¹⁰ of the members of the churches — protection, payment, and gifts — many of the sufferings now listed would not have occurred. Thus refusal to accept such patronage and its concomitant, the necessity to "labor," was not only a sign of his divine apostolate but also a significant instrument of his sufferings. But accepting such patronage would have reduced his ministry to their level, thus removing his distinctiveness (see on v. 11).

Unlike the verses preceding and succeeding, which use the generalized references "more abundantly" (v. 23), surpassingly" (v. 23), and "frequently" (vv. 23, 26, 27), vv. 24-25 give specific numbers — "five times," "once," and "three times." In their statements of their exploits the great Romans appealed to statistics; for example, in his *Res Gestae* Augustus declared, "Twice I received triumphal ovations. Three times I received curule triumphs. Twenty times and one did I receive the appellation of emperor" (*Res Gestae*

7. Gk. πολλάκις; NIV, "again and again."

8. Gk. ἐν θανάτοις, "in deaths," i.e., "exposed to death" (NIV); less probably, "mortal danger." See 4:12 — "death is at work in us," which refers back to hardships in 4:8-9.

9. Since there is no verb, but only a fourfold sequence ἐν + dative plurals, we should perhaps understand διάκονος Χριστοῦ ἐγενόμην . . . (so Bultmann, 216).

10. There are, however, examples where Paul is known to have accepted hospitality — e.g., in Jerusalem (Gal 1:18-19), in Philippi (Acts 16:15), in Thessalonica(?) (Acts 17:5), in Corinth, first with Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:3) and later with Gaius (Rom 16:23), in Ptolemais (Acts 21:7), in Caesarea (Acts 21:8), and in Jerusalem (Acts 21:16).

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4).¹¹ The numerical details given here by Paul probably belong to that tradition, except that Paul's catalogue points to his suffering and defeat.

24-25a Paul first expands upon the two kinds of "flogging" introduced in the previous verse: (1) "under Jews"¹² (the "forty lashes minus one"¹³) and (2) at Roman hands ("beaten with rods").

The former punishment arose from Deut 25:1-5, which provided for the flogging of an offender after being found guilty by judges in a court. In no case was the beating to exceed forty, administered to the man or woman bending down. The Mishnah tractate *Makkoth*, which corroborates Paul's "forty lashes minus one," nominates false witness (e.g., about a priest, that he was the son of a divorced mother — *Mak.* 1:1) as an offense for which this punishment was administered. The minister of the synagogue was to stand on a raised stone inflicting the blows "with all his might," using a redoubled calf strap, to which two other straps were attached. Thirteen blows were delivered to the chest and twenty-six to the back. The severity of this beating can be inferred from the provisions made in the event the offender defecated, urinated, or even died as a result of their blows.

On no less than five occasions the apostle "received" this the most severe beating permitted by the Jewish scriptures, which Josephus called "a most disgraceful penalty."¹⁴ Neither the Acts of the Apostles nor Paul's letters refer elsewhere to these five synagogue floggings, so that we do not know the basis of these punishments that were inflicted on him. Perhaps they arose from false charges and were designed to deter his ongoing presence in a particular town or city.

The other kind of beating Paul received — the Roman — is set in balance with the Jewish. Such "beating with rods"¹⁵ must have occurred within those cities known to have been visited by the apostle that were Roman colonies, that is, Antioch of Pisidia, Lystra, Troas, Philippi, or Corinth.¹⁶ Clearly Philippi was one such (Acts 16:22, 23, 35, 37, 38); we can only guess the location of other two. In Roman *colonia* the praetors (*stratēgoi*) were

11. For other examples of such citations of achievements, see Pliny, *Natural History* 7.26.98; Julius Caesar, *Civil Wars* 2.32.

12. Gk. ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων, "at the hands of the Jews" (NIV, "from the Jews"), for emphasis given at the head of the verse. Cf. ὑπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων (1 Thess 2:14).

13. Gk. τεσσαράκοντα παρὰ μίαν, lit. "forty less one," is suggestive of a well-known punishment among Jews. "Lashes" is to be understood (cf. v. 23b). The "less one" was to prevent overflogging. If the victim died as a result of the beating the administrator was not culpable, but he was to be exiled if the victim died where more than one lash beyond the prescribed thirty-nine lashes was applied (m. *Mak.* 3:14).

14. *Ant.* 4.231-32.

15. Gk. ἐραβδίσθη.

16. T. Cornell and J. Matthews, *Atlas*, 72-73.

preceded in public by lictors (*rabdouchoi*) who bore, as symbols of authority, bundles of elm or birch rods bound together (Latin *fusces*) as instruments of punishment. At the instruction of the praetor, the lictors would publicly beat malefactors to inflict summary and deterrent chastisement (Latin *coercitio*). As a Roman citizen Paul ought not to have suffered this indignity (cf. 1 Thess 2:2), though there are examples where the rights of Roman citizens were disregarded in this matter.¹⁷ The provocative nature of Paul's ministry created public scenes, such as that recorded in Philippi, and resulted in the rough treatment described there (Acts 16:16-23).

25b, c, d In addition to the numerous "beatings" (vv. 23, 24, 25a), which might easily have proved fatal, Paul enumerates other occasions when he was "exposed to death" (v. 23).

The "once" he was "stoned"¹⁸ must be that occasion in Lystra (so Acts 14:19¹⁹), though an attempt was contemplated in Iconium beforehand (Acts 14:5). Jews inflicted stoning as a capital punishment on adulterers, apostates, and blasphemers (Deut 17:5; 22:22-24; m. *Sanh.* 7:6-7). Ironically, Paul himself had collaborated in the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58-59). When we add this stoning to the five synagogue beatings (v. 24), we are able to gauge the sufferings of the apostle at the hands of his "countrymen" (v. 26; cf., e.g., 1 Thess 2:15; Rom 15:31; Acts 9:23, 29; 13:50; 17:5, 13; 18:6; 19:9; 21:30-31).

Neither Paul's letters nor the Acts of the Apostles casts light on Paul's "three times I was shipwrecked"²⁰; the famous shipwreck en route to Rome (Acts 27:12-44) occurred subsequent to the writing of 2 Corinthians. Nonetheless, Paul often traveled by sea in the course of his ministry before that journey,²¹ providing many opportunities for shipwreck. The leaky wooden vessels of antiquity had no life rafts nor meteorological early warning facilities. With good reason travelers faced sea voyages with trepidation. Maritime disasters were frequent.²²

17. A Roman citizen declared *ciuis Romanus sum* and was thus spared public beating. Cicero, *Against Verres* 2.5.161ff., gives an example in which this was disregarded (cf. Josephus, *J.W.* 2.308). See further A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society*, 73-74.

18. Gk. ἐλιθάσθην.

19. Cf. 1 Clement, *Corinthians* 5.

20. Gk. ἐναυάγησα; ναυ-αγεῖν derived from ναῦς (ship) + ἄγνυμι (break). The verb is found elsewhere in the NT only at 1 Tim 1:19, where it is used metaphorically.

21. Thus, e.g., Acts 13:4 (Seleucia to Cyprus); 13:13 (Paphos to Parga); 14:25-26 (Attalia to Antioch); 16:11 (Troas to Neapolis via Samothrace); 17:14-15 (Macedonia to Athens); 18:18-22 (Corinth to Caesarea via Ephesus); 2 Cor 2:1 (Ephesus to Corinth to Ephesus); 2 Cor 2:13; 7:5 (Troas to Neapolis?).

22. Augustus's prosecution of the Sicilian war was twice delayed by the loss of his entire fleet through shipwreck (Suetonius, *Augustus* 2.16.1-2; see Furnish, 516, for further examples). Regarding the perils of sea travel, see *New Docs.* 4.115.

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Finally, he specifies that he “spent²³ a night and a day²⁴ in the open sea,”²⁵ doubtless the most desperate of the three experiences of shipwreck just mentioned. From this terse description it is likely that Paul then felt all hope was gone.

When the events of vv. 24-25 are added — the five synagogue beatings, the three Roman floggings, the stoning, the three shipwrecks, one involving twenty-four hours in the open sea — we find that on at least eleven occasions Paul was indeed “exposed to death” (v. 23). This list, however, is only by way of example; it is probably not complete. Within this very letter he mentions the near-death experience in Asia (1:8-10), which finds no reference here.

26 To the four extremities listed in v. 23 — “labors . . . imprisonments . . . floggings . . . [exposed to] death” — he now adds a fifth, “journeyings frequent.”²⁶ Such travels were implicit in God’s commissioning of Paul as his “apostle to the Gentiles” (Rom 11:13); he did not go as a tourist! From c. A.D. 34-47²⁷ his movements were restricted to the eastern Mediterranean (Damascus — Jerusalem — Syria and Cilicia — Antioch — Jerusalem — Antioch), but thereafter the will of God bore him further afield, to the towns and cities of the provinces of Pamphylia, Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia and Asia.

Implicit in such “journeyings” were “dangers,”²⁸ eight of which he now recalls, the first four of which appear to be grouped in pairs, all of which climax with an indirect reference to the false apostles.

The first pair of “dangers” — “of rivers . . . of robbers” — is an example of the hazards the traveler of those times might encounter along the way. Bridges in remote regions were rare; many “rivers” would need to be forded, which in times of flooding — including “flash flooding” — would

23. Gk. *πεποίηκα*, perfect tense, which here means “spend time,” suggesting the horror of the constantly remembered experience.

24. Gk. *νυχθήμερον*, a compound (*νυχ* + *θήμερον*) means a full twenty-four-hour period, lit. “a night-day,” emphasizing the duration of the experience. This term, found only here in the NT and in literature subsequent to it, may be a peculiarly Jewish reference. Jews reckoned days from sunset to sunset (cf. Gen 1:5ff.; Lev 23:32).

25. Gk. *ἐν τῷ βυθῷ* (lit. “in the deep”) meaning “in the open sea” (clinging to wreckage?). The interpretation that Paul was submerged beneath the water for twenty-four hours and that a Jonah-like miracle occurred is fanciful.

26. Gk. *ὁδοπορίας πολλάκις*; NIV, “constantly on the move.” The dative *ὁδοπορίας* is to be understood with *ἐν*, as in *ἐν κόποις . . . ἐν φυλακαῖς . . . ἐν πληγαῖς . . . ἐν θανάτοις . . .* (v. 23).

27. The suggested date of the Jerusalem concordat (Gal 2:1-10), “fourteen years” from Paul’s Damascus Road call in c. A.D. 34, which is based on the hypothesis of A.D. 33 as the date of the crucifixion.

28. Gk. *κινδύνοις*, dative plural, agrees with *ὁδοπορίας* and bears the modal sense “risking” or “experiencing” dangers (NIV, “in danger”). Paul achieves rhetorical variation by the use of the genitive plural in the first pair, followed by *ἐκ* + the genitive plural in the next pair, followed by *ἐν* + the dative plural in the final two sets of pairs.

have presented acute difficulties. The apostle does not indicate the names of the rivers, but, with their tributaries, they will have included the Jordan in Judaea and Trachonitis, the Orontes in Syria, the Cydnus in Cilicia, the Meander and Cayster in Asia, and the Strimon and Axios in Macedonia.

Once out in the country away from urbanized regions private travelers, as opposed to escorted official parties, were vulnerable to the depredations of "robbers." This was true even in the era of greater stability provided by the *Pax Romanum*.²⁹ The poverty of life drove many to join groups of brigands who ranged unchecked in many rural regions. Where times of acute food shortage coincided with times of political turmoil — as they did in Palestine during and after the late forties on account of the great famine — the ranks of the brigand bands were swollen dramatically, assuming a political significance, especially if there was a "charismatic" leader.³⁰

By contrast with the preceding pair, the next — "dangers from my own countrymen,"³¹ dangers from Gentiles" — reflect problems faced by the apostle in towns and cities. Not uncommonly such "dangers" to Paul arose from a combination of Jewish and Gentile forces against him, as, for example, in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonica, and Corinth, where Jews stirred up, or attempted to stir up, Gentile action (Acts 13:50; 14:2, 5, 19; 17:5-6; 18:12). However, Paul was also endangered by Gentiles independently of any Jewish action, as, for example, at the time of the uprising of the silversmiths of Ephesus, which forms the immediate background to this letter (Acts 19:23-41; cf. 2 Cor 1:8-11).

At this point the classification of the "dangers" in pairs breaks down. Paul now introduces a triad — "dangers in the city, dangers in the country, dangers at sea" — thus giving an expansive impression of the breadth of his missionary travels. Of these "dangers" those of the "city . . . country" make explicit — in reverse order — what was implied in the first and second grouping ("rivers . . . robbers . . . my countrymen . . . Gentiles"). Whether in "the city" or "the country," Paul the missionary traveler faced distinctive perils. Added to that, however, was the danger he had faced from the "sea" ("three times shipwrecked, a night and a day in the open sea" — v. 25).

Anomalously, "dangers from false brothers"³² stands alone and unpaired at the foot of the list, thus giving it preeminence in this catalogue of hazards to Paul's life.

29. Although Epictetus, *Dissertations* 3.13.9, declares that there was "no brigandage on a large scale" under the *Pax Romanum*, travelers in isolated regions were vulnerable (see, e.g., Tacitus, *Annals* 6.41; 11.15).

30. See Josephus, *J.W.* 2.228-40.

31. While the Gk. ἐκ γένους means "from [the] people," Paul means his fellow Israelites (Gal 1:14; Phil 3:5).

32. Gk. ψευδαδελφοίς.

Paul's reference here to "false brothers" (*pseudadelphoi*) and to "false apostles" (*pseudapostoloi*) earlier in this passage (v. 13) is striking; he rarely uses words with the prefix *pseud-*.³³ Some connection between the two is implied. In regard to "false brothers" the context of the only other reference (Gal 2:4) identifies them as believers (they were in some sense "brothers") in Jerusalem who were revealed to be "false" by their attempt to make obligatory the rite of circumcision on the Gentile believer Titus, thus overturning "the truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:5; cf. 2:14). These same "false brothers" came from Jerusalem to Antioch, attempting to compel Gentiles "to live like Jews," thus compromising the "truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:11-14).

Paul's sole reference to "false apostles" is within this passage and points to those newly arrived persons who have sought to pass themselves off as "apostles of Christ" (see on v. 13). These "false apostles" are "Hebrews . . . Israelites . . . seed of Abraham . . . ministers of Christ" (v. 22) and are, in all probability, to be identified with the "false brothers" of v. 26 (and Gal 2:4). "False brothers" who are "false apostles" have — in some sense — been welcomed by believers in Corinth (11:4), and bring "danger" to the apostle. Paul's life may have been indirectly imperiled by the action of members of the Corinthian assembly.

We can only speculate how such "false brothers" posed "danger" to Paul. Since they were observant Jews (from Jerusalem?) who had come to the cities in the Jewish Diaspora where Paul had established his Gentile-dominated assemblies devoted to the Messiah Jesus, their "danger" to him may have arisen indirectly from their contact with the synagogues that effectively put in negative contrast Paul's insistence that no demands be imposed on Gentiles touching the ordinances of Judaism (cf. Gal 5:1). The presence locally of such Jewish Christian "brothers" may have sparked off a chain reaction³⁴ whereby first Jews and then, in consequence, Gentiles³⁵ opposed Paul, thus putting his life at risk.

27 Having indicated the various sources of hardship — "labors . . . imprisonments . . . floggings . . . [exposed to] death . . . journeyings" (vv. 23, 26), Paul now reflects on these from the perspective of their personal impact on him.³⁶

33. Cf. "false witness" (1 Cor 15:15 — *ψευδόμαρτυς*); "liar" (1 Tim 4:2 — *ψευδόλογος*).

34. Based on Gal 6:12 (cf. 1:7), it appears that non-Christian Jews persecuted Christian Jews, who in turn "agitated" that Gentile believers submit to circumcision. In a later letter Paul attributes direct malice to Judaizing Christian Jews who "preach Christ" (Phil 1:15, 17; cf. 3:2-6).

35. See the comment above on "dangers of my own people, dangers from Gentiles."

36. The sentence is without a verb, the instrumental datives without and with *ἐν* naturally translating themselves as "[I have] labor[ed] and toil[ed] and have] often [gone] without sleep; [I have known] hunger and thirst [and have] often [gone] without food; [I have been] cold and naked" (so NIV).

Structurally, Paul sets forth three doublets that are separated by two examples of "frequently" experienced (see vv. 23, 26) privations.³⁷

By labor and toil,
in sleepless nights frequently,
in hunger and thirst,
without food frequently,
in cold and nakedness

The apostle's determination not to burden the churches — a point of dispute in Corinth (see on 11:7-12; cf. 1 Cor 9:12, 15) — is captured by his doublet "by labor and toil,"³⁸ a phrase he uses elsewhere in relation to his work in supporting himself (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8). Night and day in place after place Paul labored at the exhausting and filthy task of making and repairing leather tents³⁹ (see on v. 7).

This is followed logically by the punctuating privation "in sleepless nights *frequently*"; much of Paul's "labor and toil" was done at night in order to permit his preaching the gospel by day (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8; see on 6:5, where "labor" and "sleepless nights" are paired).

The second doublet, "hunger and thirst," probably evokes memories of sufferings associated with vast distances Paul traveled through the inhospitable and barren terrain of the eastern provinces. It was his lot to experience the extremes of flooded rivers on the one hand (v. 26) and, in all probability, dry creekbeds on the other. Moreover, many miles separated the towns along the way where the apostolic traveler might find work to do and food to purchase.

The second punctuating doublet, "without food *frequently*" is repeated from the earlier list, where it is also joined with "labor" and "sleepless nights" (6:5). It is probably to be associated with involuntary lack of food rather than with fasting, which finds no clear reference in Paul's letters (see on 6:5).

The concluding doublet, "in cold and nakedness,"⁴⁰ an illogical sequence, perhaps evokes memories of shipwreck, capture by robbers, or imprisonment.

So concludes the apostle's list of his physical sufferings begun at v. 23b. He will turn now to speak of his emotional pain (vv. 28-30).

37. With this part of the list Paul moves closer to hardships catalogued elsewhere (1 Cor 4:11-13; 2 Cor 4:7-8; 6:4-5; cf. Rom 8:35-36).

38. Gk. κόπῳ καὶ μόχθῳ; NIV, "I have labored and toiled." The order κόπῳ . . . μόχθῳ is not logical; κόπῳ implies fatigue, μόχθῳ hard labor.

39. Gk. σκηνοποι[ός] τῇ τέχνῃ, "by trade they were tentmakers" (Acts 18:3, RSV; cf. 20:33-35).

40. From this passage κίνδυνος, λιμός, and γυμνότης are repeated in Rom 8:35.

28 The opening words, "apart from everything else,"⁴¹ serve to tail off the sufferings listed in vv. 23b-27. They signal that the list is illustrative, not complete. Nonetheless, logically they belong with and introduce the two phrases following: (1) "the daily pressure on me,"⁴² that is, (2) "my anxiety for all the churches." The location of this verse at the end of the list of privations suggests that his concern for the churches was the source of his deepest suffering. The questions of the next verse, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I do not burn?" clinch the point.

By "all the churches" Paul means the churches established by his apostolic mission and for which he bore an ongoing sense of "anxiety." This sense of "anxiety" was fed by the daily "assault" (*epistasis*) of the reports about those churches that came to him, whether by letter or by personal contact. Paul's letters are his response to the succession of communications that impacted him and provoked deep concerns for his fragile missionary assemblies. The extant letters to the Corinthians, for example, objectify and "freeze" for all time the "anxiety" he felt for them at the time in response to the news about them as it came to him.

Given the alienation of the world from God and its treatment of the One who came from God (cf. 5:18-21), it is no surprise that the apostle of Christ to the Gentiles should encounter the opposition and difficulties listed above in the course of his journeys proclaiming the word of God (cf. 2:14-17). However, we might have expected that, by contrast, the assemblies of believers called into being by that word would have been a source of unalloyed pleasure to him. To be sure, he acknowledges great joy arising from, for example, the Philippians and the Thessalonians (Phil 4:1; 1 Thess 2:19), and he refers to the churches generally as "the glory of Christ" (see on 8:23). Nonetheless, not even those churches that brought him joy were without their shortcomings, to say nothing of the Corinthians! Thus he speaks of "pressure" on him with its resulting "anxiety" for these communities of faith, thus serving as a reminder that although the "day of salvation" has arrived (6:2), it is not yet perfected. The churches of God were and remain a source of joy, but also of anxiety, to those who are their pastors.

41. Gk. χωρὶς τῶν παρεχτός; NIV, "besides everything else." The genitive τῶν is probably neuter, "things," not "people" (which would have been τῶν ἑξωθεν — cf. 1 Tim 3:7). The phrase χωρὶς τῶν παρεχτός is taken as (1) "apart from the things that are without," i.e., the external hardships previously listed (so RV), or, more probably, (2) "apart from the things that are omitted" (so, effectively, RSV, NIV, and most commentators). This suggests that the privations listed are illustrative, not exhaustive, and that his anxiety for the churches was the greatest suffering of all.

42. Gk. ἡ ἐπίστασις μοι; NIV, "I face daily the pressures." In its Hellenistic use ἡ ἐπίστασις meant "attack" or "onset" (2 Macc 6:3). Although BAGD gives "supervision" as a possible meaning, more probably it should be taken as "that which presses or rushes"; hence ἡ ἐπίστασις μοι ἢ καθ' ἡμέραν would mean "the daily pressure — or onset — on me."

Thus Paul completes his list of sufferings. Under the general headings of "labors . . . imprisonments . . . floggings . . . [exposed to] death . . . journeyings" (vv. 23b, 26a),⁴³ he has given numerous examples of grim events that impacted on him and that he sustained in the course of his mission work. But coming at the end of the list, as if to reach a climax, he cites "the daily impact on me, my anxiety for all the churches." According to Chrysostom, "This was the chief thing of all, that his soul was distracted, and his thoughts divided."⁴⁴

The catalogue of hardships — general and specific, objective and emotional, physical and spiritual — that he has supplied provides an indelible image of Paul's apostolic ministry. But Paul does not paint a freestanding picture of his apostolate; he intends it as a paradigm for the comparison of his ministry with those "ministers of Christ" who claim to be "better" (*hyper* — cf. v. 23a). If he is a "better" minister of Christ (v. 23), it is precisely because by this list of "weaknesses" he follows the paradigm of Christ. By their self-presentation the "false apostles" measured themselves as "superior" and Paul "inferior," so as to disenfranchise him (see on vv. 4-6). But he will not engage in those comparisons, except to point to sufferings that surpass theirs. In an insight of modern applicability, Chrysostom noted long ago that Paul says nothing here about results, about the number of his converts; he counts only the sufferings incurred in missionary labor to prove the reality of his calling.⁴⁵

29 Finally, and in direct response to v. 28, he asks rhetorically:

Who⁴⁶ is weak, and I am not weak?

Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

By these two questions, "am I not weak? . . . am I not indignant?" Paul spells out the "anxiety" of the previous verse. It is the "anxiety" of the pastor's compassionate identification with "the weak" and with "those who have been made to fall." Here is the greatest suffering of the apostle Paul.

But there is another level of understanding.⁴⁷ Paul's question effectively completes his "comparison" of v. 21b and establishes that he is a "better . . . minister of Christ" (v. 23), a "comparison" that he proceeded to

43. These sufferings were no isolated or recent thing. Earlier he wrote, "To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless" (1 Cor 4:11). Later he would write, "Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword [separate us from the love of Christ]?" (Rom 8:35).

44. Quoted in Plummer, 330.

45. Observed by Plummer, 328.

46. Gk. τίς, "Who"? a rhetorical interrogative (as in 2:2, 16; 5:7; Rom 8:35a), not a generic pointing to a particular opponent or opponents (as in v. 21b).

47. Plummer's identification of Paul's "weakness" with his "anxiety for the churches" (331) of the previous verse is too restricted.

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illustrate by catalogues of "labors . . . imprisonments . . . floggings . . . [exposed to] death . . . journeyings" (vv. 23b, 26a; cf. vv. 23b-28). Thus the answer implicit in his question is: "No one compares with Paul in the 'weakness' of privations suffered in the pursuit of his ministry. The 'false-apostles' claim 'superiority,' but if the marks of true Christian ministry are suffering in Christ's service, Paul is 'better.'"

Paul's question takes us back to his biting attack on their exploitation and violation of the Corinthians (v. 20), in which he bitterly asserts, "To my shame we were too *weak* for that" (v. 21a). Thus Paul's question, "Who is weak, and I am not weak?" declares his pastoral identification with and care for the "weak" in the churches, something that he elaborated in the First Letter (1 Cor 8:9-13; cf. Rom 14:1-23). Paul identifies with the oppressed and abused in the church against those intruding false shepherds who exploit them.

This identification is restated and painfully reemphasized in the second rhetorical question, "Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?" Paul's concern lest the "weak" among the Corinthians are "made to fall"⁴⁸ reflects his burden expressed elsewhere (1 Cor 8:13; Rom 14:21) and takes up the warning of the Lord, "Whoever *causes* one of these little ones who believe in me to *sin* . . ." (Mark 9:42 pars.; cf. Matt 18:7; Luke 17:1). Here, paradoxically, Paul combines gentle pastoral identification with fiery indignation⁴⁹ for the abused "weak" among God's people. This combination of loving identification with and hot indignation for the misused among the people of God may be seen earlier in Jesus' teaching (as above) and example (the expulsion of the merchants from the temple — John 2:16), and beyond that to the prophets' denunciation of the false ministers of Israel for their assault upon the vulnerable members of the covenant people (e.g., Isa 28:7-9; Jer 23:9ff.; Ezek 12:21-14:11). Such passionate care is of a piece with the apostle's "godly jealousy" for Christ's bride-to-be, the (Corinthian) church, vulnerable to deflection from loyalty to her Lord (see on vv. 2-4).

Thus, this verse is very important within the structure of the "Fool's Speech" because (1) it drives home to the Corinthians his greatest pain of all, his "anxiety" for the churches (v. 28), including the Corinthian church, and (2) it reintroduces the "weakness" theme of v. 21, so that "weakness" can

48. Gk. *σκανδαλίζεται*; NIV, "led into sin." While Paul employs the verb elsewhere only in 1 Cor 8:13, the noun *σκάνδαλον*, "stumbling stone," occurs in 1 Cor 1:23; Rom 14:13; 16:17; Gal 5:11 as well as in various citations, e.g., Rom 9:33 (quoting LXX Isa 28:16 and 8:14). Paul's usage may derive from Jesus (Matt 13:41; 16:23; 18:7; Luke 17:1); see H. Giesen, *EDNT* 3.249-50.

49. Gk. *ἐγὼ πυροῦμαι*; NIV, "I inwardly burn." Note the emphatic pronoun. Although the verb *πυροῦσθαι* is set in eschatological contexts elsewhere (e.g., 1 Cor 7:9; Eph 6:16; 2 Pet 3:12; Rev 1:15; 3:18), it is here used metaphorically (cf. 1 Cor 7:9); the present context does not demand an eschatological understanding.

be repeated in the next verse, but now as the object of another keyword, "boasting" (vv. 10, 12, 16, 17, 18). These two words provide the link to the great climax of the "Fool's Speech," Paul's "boasting in weakness" (see 12:1, 5, 6, 9, 10).

30 As noted in v. 29, this verse — together with that verse — forms the base from which springs the climax of the "Fool's Speech," where Paul "boasts" of his "weaknesses" (12:7-10). Retrospectively, it goes back to the previous chapter, where Paul refers to those who would "classify or compare" Paul with themselves so as to "commend" and "boast" of their ministry (10:12-13) as "superior" to his (11:5, 23).

"If," or, better, "since," he "must boast,"⁵⁰ he "will boast"⁵¹ of [his] weaknesses."⁵² In the struggle between the intruders and Paul, the founder of the church in Corinth, "boasting" by means of "classification and comparison" was employed to establish superiority ("better" — *hyper* — v. 23) and therefore legitimacy in ministry. Paul's opponents, whom he calls "superlative" apostles (v. 5; 12:11), "boasted" of their superiority — but "according to the flesh" (v. 18), in professionalism in speech (11:5-6), and in "visions and revelations" (12:1).

But Paul will "boast" only of "weaknesses," of those privations that arose from traveling from place to place, in "labor and toil" so as to offer the gospel "without charge," the badge of his apostleship (see on vv. 10, 12). To "boast" of "weaknesses" and to "boast" of "not being paid" (v. 10) are closely related.

The rhetorical question ("Who is weak, and I am not weak?") in the the previous verse demands the answer that Paul excelled all others in "weakness," making him — in their terms — a "better" minister of Christ (v. 23). This is not the way Paul would have ordinarily expressed it. It is "fool's speak" (vv. 1, 16 [twice], 17, 19; 12:6, 11), the talk of a "madman" (v. 23), by which he mocks and parodies their manner of seeking superiority over him. But because "many" have "boasted" (11:18) as a result of their "comparison" and "classification" of Paul with themselves, they have forced him to become a "fool" (12:11). Thus, he "must boast" (cf. 12:1), and so be a "fool." As such he is the poor, stumbling, suffering prisoner-of-war led about by God in his victory triumph (see on 2:14).

50. The initial εἰ, "if," carries the meaning of ἐπεὶ, "since." The pronominal subject ("I") of καυχᾶσθαι is understood.

51. Gk. καυχῆσομαι, although a future, is given as a summary of his reasons for "boasting" in the manner of a "fool."

52. Gk. ἀσθενείας, which, with its cognates, is one of the keywords in the latter part of this letter (see 12:5, 9, 10; 13:4). Note the use of the plural here and in 12:5, 9, 10, where concrete examples of experienced weakness are probably in mind.

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31 "Foolish" though this speech is, it is nonetheless true, as he now proceeds to declare by this oath:⁵³

The God and Father of the Lord Jesus,
who is blessed forever,

knows that I do not lie.

Here Paul speaks as both a Christian and a Hebrew. As a devoted Israelite (v. 22), he acknowledges the "God . . . who is blessed forever." This devout ascription to God finds many parallels in the synagogue benedictions of that period (e.g., "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God and God of our fathers. . . . Blessed art thou, O Lord, the shield of Abraham"⁵⁴).

But as a Christian believer he now "blesses" the God of his fathers as "The God and Father of the Lord Jesus" (see on 1:3).⁵⁵ This brief benediction testifies (1) to the conviction of Jesus of Nazareth that he was "son" of his *abba*-God (see, e.g., Mark 12:6; 14:36; Matt 11:25-27), and (2) to the remarkable conversion of the persecutor Saul of Tarsus in acknowledging that the crucified Nazarene was the "Lord," the "son" of the God of Israel (1:19; 4:5; cf. Gal 1:15-16), whom he must now "bless" as the "Father of the Lord Jesus."

In what he has been saying about his "weaknesses" (vv. 23-28) — and what he will yet say about them (12:5-10) — Paul adjures that "God . . . knows that I do not lie."⁵⁶ The oath asserting his truthfulness earlier in the chapter ("the truth of Christ is in me" — v. 10) must be seen as echoed, though inverted, in this oath denying deceit. These oaths are connected (see on v. 10). The former oath supports his "boast" in offering the gospel "free of charge," while the latter oath sustains his "boast" of "weaknesses" (v. 30; cf. vv. 23-28). These "weaknesses," however, significantly flow from his "labors" (v. 23; cf. v. 27), the direct consequence of insisting on a ministry without payment.

By his asseveration "God . . . knows" Paul is profoundly aware of God's knowledge of his inner life ("what we are is known to God" — 5:11, *q.v.*; cf. 2:17; 4:2; 12:19). The force of Paul's denial of duplicity ("I do not

53. Other oaths in this letter are found at 1:18, 23; 2:10; 11:11 (cf. Gal 1:20; Rom 9:1).

54. Benediction 1, quoted in E. Schürer, *Jewish People*, 2.456. There are occasions when Paul simply "blesses" God, as a Hebrew might (see, e.g., Rom 1:25; 9:5).

55. This is a briefer version of the benediction found near the beginning of the letter — "Blessed be the God and Father of *our* Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3; cf. Eph 1:3, 17; 1 Pet 1:3; John 20:17).

56. For similar oaths denying deceit so as to assert his truthfulness — i.e., by the rhetorical device *litotes* — see Gal 1:20; Rom 9:1.

lie" — *ou pseudomai*) is very pointed in regard to those whom he has called "false apostles" (*pseudapostoloi*) . . . deceitful workers . . . false brothers (*pseudadelphoi* — vv. 13, 26). Paul's truthfulness before God serves to emphasize their deceitfulness and falsity.

32-33 These verses strike even the casual reader as odd. Having given this list of grim privations, why does Paul now relate his being lowered down the city wall of Damascus and his escape from the Ethnarch who had set guard on that city to seize him? Numerous explanations have been offered for the description of this event, which appears so out of place in Paul's argument.⁵⁷

Two connected reasons that may best explain these verses⁵⁸ and account for their location in relation to the passage following⁵⁹ are (1) that being "lowered down" in these verses symmetrically counterpoises his description of the man who was "caught up" into the "third heaven/Paradise" (12:2, 4), and (2) that taken together his being "lowered down" and "caught up" form a comic-tragic parody of his opponents' "boast" of "superiority" arising from their "visions and revelations" (12:1). By this hypothesis vv. 32-33 establish an ironic counterbalance ("lowered down") that will be exploited in the passage following ("caught up").

57. E. F. F. Bishop, "Aretas," 188-89, declared these verses to be "out of context, out of style, quite out of connection" (189). It has been regarded as misplaced from Gal 1 (so Bishop) or as an interpolation, suggestions for which there is no textual support.

58. The explanation following, broadly speaking, is the view of Martin (384, following J. Zmijewski, 289), to which he adds the suggestion of E. A. Judge, "The Conflict of Educational Aims in NT Thought," 32-45, that the readership of *Roman Corinth* would have been familiar with the "wall crown" (Latin *corona muralis*; στέφανος τείχιος — see Furnish Plate VIII) awarded to brave soldiers who were first over the wall during the siege of an enemy city (see, e.g., Polybius, *Histories* 6.39.5; Livy, *History* 6.20.8; 10.46.3; 26.48.5). According to A. Gellius, "The 'mural crown' is that which is awarded by a commander to a man who is first to mount the wall and force his way into an enemy town . . ." (*Attic Nights* 5.6.16). On this view, Paul's being lowered down a wall points to his humiliation. Although this would be a reversal of his earlier conquest imagery (10:3-6), it is by no means unlikely that Paul could employ both triumphalist and antitriumphalist language (see on 2:14). Martin's further suggestion that Paul is alluding here to Prov 21:22 ("A wise man scales the cities of the mighty and brings down the stronghold in which the godless trust") appears to be too oblique.

59. It is quite likely that (1) the events in Damascus (11:32-33), (2) his being "caught up" to Paradise fourteen years ago (12:1-6), and (3) his being staked "in the flesh" (12:7-10) were sequential. Nonetheless, verses that relate his lowering "down" appear to be juxtaposed deliberately next to verses where he is "caught up." Unconvincing are the suggestions that these verses are (1) "an afterthought" (so Tasker), or (2) illustrative of problems Paul faced in cities — v. 26 (so Plummer), or (3) an elaborate postscript to his other sufferings on account of the ill repute the Damascus flight brought to Paul (so Menzies).

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These verses primarily serve Paul's rhetorical purpose as part of his "Fool's Speech" against his opponents' claims to superiority. Nonetheless, they also supply, firsthand, valuable historical detail that supplements the account of Paul's ministry in Damascus found in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 9:8-25, especially 9:23-25).

After Christ's encounter with him en route to Damascus, Paul entered the city; then, after an indeterminate period, he went to "Arabia," before returning to Damascus (Gal 1:17). It is uncertain whether Damascus was under Nabataean (i.e., "Arabian") or Roman control during the thirties.⁶⁰ Either way the Nabataean king, Aretas IV,⁶¹ had an "Ethnarch"⁶² in the city, either as his governor (in the less likely case that Damascus was then under direct Nabataean rule) or as Aretas's appointed leader to the Nabataean community within Roman jurisdiction (in the more probable case that the city was then under direct Roman rule).

Although Paul was sought by Nabataean authorities in the city, the historical uncertainty about the control of Damascus at that time leaves open the question whether his misdemeanors were committed inside Damascus or in "Arabia," that is, within the Nabataean kingdom. Whatever the case, at some time after his return to Damascus, the Damascene Ethnarch of a Nabataean king set guards⁶³ at the city gates in order to seize Paul. But Paul

60. Nabataean rule of Damascus during the thirties is urged because (1) there is an absence of Roman coins A.D. 34-62, and (2) Caligula (A.D. 37-41) was known to have reinstated a number of eastern client kings. To advocate Nabataean rule in that period on those grounds, however, is to argue from silence.

61. Gk. Ἀρέτας. Possibly a Hellenized version of *Haritha*, or similar to the Greek word ἀρετή, "excellence," but especially of manly qualities, "valor," or "prowess." Aretas IV ruled the vast desert kingdom of Nabataea, whose capital was Petra, from 9 B.C. to A.D. 40. Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee/Peraea from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39, had married Aretas's daughter (to resolve endemic border disputes?), only to divorce her to marry Herodias. Sometime later Aretas inflicted a crushing defeat on Antipas's armies. Antipas complained to Tiberius, who dispatched Vitellius, Legate of Syria, against Aretas. Only the death of Tiberius (A.D. 37) prevented Vitellius from pushing on to Petra, thus sparing Aretas (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.109-26). Aretas's Ethnarch in Damascus knew of Paul's activities; it is possible but not certain that the Nabataean king had heard of the apostle. See further Furnish, 521-22.

62. Gk. ὁ ἐθνάρχης (NIV, "governor"), literally means "ruler of a nation" (ἔθν + ἀρχης). Augustus applied it as a conveniently lesser title than king to Archelaus in 4 B.C., as probationary ruler of Judaea. It was also used as a title for the leader of a self-contained ethnic community, as, e.g., of the Jewish enclave in Alexandria (Josephus, *Ant.* 14.117). Strabo, *Geography* 17.798, helpfully comments that an ethnarch "governs the nation, and distributes justice to them and takes care of their contracts and of the laws pertaining to them, as if he were the ruler of a free republic."

63. Gk. ἐφρούρει (NIV, "guarded"), an imperfect, suggesting that watch was kept for a considerable period.

eluded the Ethnarch's guards⁶⁴ and made his escape through a window in the city wall⁶⁵ from which he was lowered⁶⁶ (by Paul's "disciples" — Acts 9:25) in a "basket,"⁶⁷ and so escaped his clutches.⁶⁸ It is difficult to escape a note of ignominy here. No scaler of the wall bringing victory he; no crown of gold for his crowning victory. Rather, like a coward in battle, he "escapes" through the wall and is lowered to the ground in what may have been a fish basket! After Paul's escape from the Nabataean Ethnarch of Damascus he went to Jerusalem (Gal. 1:18).

The incident described in these verses impinges on our chronological reconstructions of Paul's ministry. The death of Aretas IV in A.D. 40 establishes the latest date possible for Paul's escape from Damascus, and therefore a latest possible date A.D. 37/38 for Paul's conversion two to three years earlier (see Gal 1:15-18). It is quite likely, however, that, given A.D. 33 as the year of the crucifixion of Jesus,⁶⁹ Paul's Damascus Road encounter would have occurred in A.D. 34/35, and the flight from Damascus in A.D. 36/37.

(3) The Climax of Weakness (12:1-10)

Now we come to the climax of Paul's "Fool's Speech," the point where he "boasts" of his most extreme "weakness," the "thorn in the flesh . . . a messenger of Satan" (12:7-9). But here, too, we arrive at the climax of his exposure of the religious pride of the "superlative" apostles.

Through "visions and revelations" from the Lord, Paul had been transported to Paradise, where he had heard words that he was not permitted to utter (12:1-6). But God's "gift" to him of a protracted and debilitating "weakness" pinned him to the earth in humility and dependence on the Lord. Notwithstanding repeated prayer, the "weakness" was not removed; Paul had to be content with Christ's power to endure this suffering. The message is

64. According to Acts 9:23-24, the Jews in Damascus were watching to apprehend Paul, which is not necessarily at odds with 2 Cor 11:31-33; Paul may have been in trouble with Arabs and Jews!

65. Gk. διὰ τοῦ τείχους, lit. "through the [city] wall." Cf. Josh 2:15-18 for the prostitute Rahab's help in the escape of the Hebrew spies through (a window in her house in) the wall of the city of Jericho. For examples of other escapes over and through walls and windows in biblical and other literature, see Furnish, 523.

66. Gk. ἐχαλάσθην, used elsewhere of the lowering of fishing nets (Luke 5:4) or of ship's gear into the water (Acts 27:17). The passive voice indicates that Paul had assistance; Acts 9:25 says "his disciples" lowered him.

67. Gk. ἐν σαργάνῃ, a flexible basket; cf. σπυρίς (Acts 9:25).

68. Gk. ἐξέφυγον τὰς χεῖρας αὐτοῦ, lit. "I escaped out of his hands."

69. So C. J. Humphreys and W. G. Waddington, "Dating the Crucifixion," 743-46.

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clear. Through their "visions and revelations" the newcomers are uplifted in religious pride; they are, indeed, "superlative" apostles. In the unremoved "thorn" Paul exercises his ministry in humility and patience, lacking power of his own, utterly dependent on the Lord. God's power is made perfect in weakness.

(a) Visions and Revelations (12:1-6)

1 I must¹ go on boasting.² Although there is nothing to be gained,³ I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. 2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know — God knows. 3 And I know that this man — whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows — 4 was caught up to Paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. 5 I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. 6 Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what⁴ I do or say.

Paul's "boasting" is an unprofitable exercise, something that the "boasting" of his opponents has forced upon him (vv. 1, 11). Indeed, much that follows appears to "mirror," but so as to correct, the claims of these men. Thus he will come to "visions and revelations from the Lord" (v. 1), specifically the rapture of a man in Christ, some fourteen years ago, in which, however, the man "caught up" brought nothing back that he was free to tell (vv. 2-4). Should he choose to boast of that man, it would not be foolish; all that he says is true (v. 5). But he will boast of weaknesses, that is, about himself, lest they think "more" than they should of the man they have seen and heard (v. 6). Thus Paul does not deny the substance (that he had such experiences), but their significance! Contrary to the intruders' hopes, such phenomena do not authenticate ministry.

1. To be retained is δεῖ, "must," over against the connective δέ (as in $\aleph^*$ D); see Metzger, 584.

2. The reading καυχᾶσθαι δεῖ is well supported (e.g. p^{46} B D^c G P it^{d,g} syr^{p,h} goth). Καυχᾶσθαι δὲ has only marginal support.

3. Gk. οὐ συμφέρον μὲν is to be retained (as in p^{46} $\aleph^*$) over against various other alternatives inserted to improve the difficult syntax; see Metzger, 584.

4. Metzger, 585, supports ἀκούει [τι] because of balanced evidence for ($\aleph^*$ B D^c F^g G 33 424 it^g vg syr^p cop^{sa,bo}) and against (p^{46} $\aleph^c$ D^{*} K L P Ψ 104 it^d) the inclusion of τι.

1a Paul's "I must go on⁵ boasting"⁶ serves as a reminder of the daring rhetorical exercise in which he has been engaged (as from 11:1, the formal beginning of the "Fool's Speech"), in which "boasting" has played a critical role (see 11:16, 17, 18, 30).

But "boasting" is (1) the action of a "fool" (cf. 11:16), (2) is not speaking "according to the Lord" but "in foolishness" (11:17), and (3), by inference, "is not helpful"⁷ (NIV, "nothing [is] to be gained"). Why, then, does Paul "boast"? Because "many" — that is, Paul's opponents, the false apostles — "boast" (11:18), Paul, "too, . . . must boast" (cf. 11:30). He has been "forced" to be "a fool" (12:11), given no alternative but to "boast."

Thus this short opening statement serves (1) to remind us of the important "boasting" theme, as used to this point, and (2) as a platform from which will spring his remarks about "boasting" to bring the "Fool's Speech" to its climax (v. 9).

1b Despite its questionable helpfulness Paul will speak about his visions and revelations. His use of the balancing particles⁸ sets in contrast the two phrases:

Although it is unhelpful,
nonetheless

I will come to visions and revelations from the Lord.

While on the one hand there is no benefit in it, yet on the other he will proceed to "visions and revelations." Thus Paul signals immediately that such things are irrelevant in the present discussion on legitimacy in apostleship ("It is not

5. Gk. ἐλεύσομαι, "I will come," indicates moving on to a new subject.

6. Gk. καυχᾶσθαι δεῖ, present tense infinitive, with the pronoun "I" understood.

7. Gk. οὐ συμφέρον (cf. 8:10) are part of a μὲν . . . δέ construction, requiring the juxtaposition

Although it is not helpful,
nonetheless I will come to visions and revelations from the Lord.

At the same time, it seems likely that Paul also wants to connect οὐ συμφέρον μὲν with the preceding καυχᾶσθαι δεῖ; hence the overall sense might be

I must go on boasting —
it is not helpful —
but I will come to visions and revelations from the Lord.

The grammar is awkward; Plummer (337) suggests that the text may have been emended. Paul may want to say (1) that "visions and revelations from the Lord" are "unhelpful," and (2) that because the "boasting" in question is of "visions and revelations from the Lord," it is also "unhelpful."

8. Gk. μὲν . . . δέ.

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helpful, but . . ."). It is only because the Corinthians have forced him to become a "fool," that is, "to boast" (12:11; cf. 11:16), that he does so. But, as we shall see, boast of "visions and revelations" he will not, but of "weaknesses" (v. 9). Such matters as "visions and revelations" are private, between Paul and God; they are "for God," not "for the Corinthians" (see on 5:13).

Did these "visions and revelations"⁹ emanate "from the Lord," or were they "of the Lord," that is, did they have the Lord as their object? Paul's genitive (*kyriou*) could mean either "from the Lord" or "of the Lord," or both. The view we have taken is that "visions and revelations" are "from the Lord"¹⁰ because (1) "Lord" is more likely to be subject than object since both nouns are connected to it, because (2) in vv. 2-4 no appearing of the Lord to Paul is involved, and because, (3) given the centrality of Paul's Damascus road call (Gal 1:16, 18; 2:1), we would have expected a different form of words; "revelation" would have been singular, and it would have preceded "visions."

That God gave Paul "visions and revelations from the Lord" is well attested within his own letters and by the Acts of the Apostles.¹¹ However, the terminology is curious: (1) "visions" precedes "revelations,"¹² and (2) both are plural. We suggest that the expression is offhand, and perhaps dismissive in intent.¹³ If, as seems likely, his opponents are claiming paranor-

9. Gk. ὀπτασίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεις κυρίου. The use of plurals without articles signifies that Paul is taking up a general topic for discussion rather than that Paul has experienced multiple "visions and revelations." This is Paul's only use of ὀπτασία (but see Acts 26:19); and although he uses ἀποκάλυψις elsewhere — of the end time (1 Cor 1:7; Rom 2:5), of his apostolic call (Gal 1:12), of God's instruction to him (Gal 2:2), and of God's "revelation" to the NT prophets (1 Cor 14:6, 26) — only here and in v. 7 does the plural ἀποκαλύψεις appear.

10. This is the view of most commentators (e.g., Plummer, 338; Bruce, 246; and Furnish, 524). However, Martin, 397, warns of "too sharp a distinction," and Hughes, 428 n. 97, argues that Paul intends both an objective and a subjective sense. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that his parallel reference, "revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:12), in its context makes "Jesus Christ" the object and God the revealer (Gal 1:16).

11. To the point at which Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, apart from the ἀποκαλύψεις of 12:2-4, 7, we know of such phenomena at *Damascus* (Acts 9:3-9 — φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ; 26:19 — τῇ οὐρανίῳ ὀπτασίᾳ; Gal. 1:12 — ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ); at *Jerusalem* (Acts 22:17-21 — ἰδεῖν αὐτὸν λέγοντά μοι); at *Antioch* (Gal. 2:1 — κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν); at *Corinth* (Acts 18:9-10 — δι' ὄραματος) and subsequent to 2 Corinthians at *Jerusalem* (Acts 23:11 — ἐπιστὰς αὐτῷ ὁ κύριος); and at *sea* en route to Rome (Acts 27:23-24 — παρέστη . . . μοι . . . ἄγγελος). Cf. Paul's vision in Troas of the man from Macedonia (Acts 16:9, 10 — ὄραμα), and Ananias's vision in Damascus (Acts 9:12 — ἐν ὄραματι).

12. W. Michaelis, *TDNT* 5.352-53, regards ὀπτασίαι and ἀποκαλύψεις as interchangeable, noting that at v. 7 Paul speaks only of ἀποκάλυψις.

13. See Martin, 396, who thinks that Paul seeks to avoid drawing too much attention to himself.

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4 that he was caught up to Paradise
 and he heard unutterable words,
 which are not lawful
 for a man to speak.¹⁸

In these verses Paul narrates¹⁹ the ascent of “a man in Christ” to the “third heaven/Paradise.” The tripartite structure — (1) introductory, (2) repetitive, and (3) climactic — corresponds approximately with these three verses.

In the *Introduction* (v. 2) Paul supplies the basic information that (1) he "know[s]" this "man," (2) who was "caught up"²⁰ to the third heaven fourteen years ago, and (3) that he does "not know" whether or not this rapture was bodily; only "God knows." In the *Repetition* (v. 3²¹) Paul repeats the previous three elements, except that (1) he now refers to "such a man," and (2) he omits the first "I do not know." In the *Climax* (v. 4) he completes the narrative of "a man in Christ . . . such a man" (vv. 2, 3), who was "caught up to Paradise,"²² where he heard "unutterable utterances,"²³ words "not lawful" to speak.²⁴

18. My translation.

19. See Martin, 392, for tabular comparison of vv. 3-4 with v. 2. Martin sees "Semitic" synthetic parallelism in a two-part structure ("caught up . . . caught up"). Be that as it may, a three-part narrative, with a climax ("a man in Christ . . . such a man . . . caught up to Paradise," where "he heard unutterable words . . . not lawful . . . to speak"), appears to be a useful description of the text. For general discussion, see further C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven*, 381.

20. Gk. ἀρπαγέντα, accusative passive participle of the verb ἀρπάζειν, which reappears as a passive indicative in v. 4 (ἡρπάγη). This verb is found elsewhere in Paul only at 1 Thess 4:17 (ἀρπαγησόμεθα). Acts 8:39 states that "the Spirit of the Lord caught up (ἡρπασεν) Philip," and Rev 12:5 describes the rapture of Christ (ἡρπάσθη τὸ τέκνον αὐτῆς πρὸς τὸν θεόν). For references in apocalyptic literature to the rapture of a person, see, e.g., 1 Enoch 39:3-4; 52:1; Apoc. Moses 37:3, and in rabbinic literature Hag. 14b.

21. The initial καί has been taken by some (e.g., Plummer, 344) to point to a second experience, and was so taken by a number of patristic writers (e.g., Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, and Tertullian); the one date "fourteen years ago" militates against this view. Rather, the καί is ascensive (BAGD 1.3), signaling that more information is to be given about this "man," namely, that "he was caught up to Paradise" and "heard" speech that he was not allowed to utter.

22. Gk. παράδεισος, "Paradise," occurs in two other places in the NT (Luke 23:43; Rev 2:7) and arises from (1) LXX references to "the garden of Eden," planted by God, "the garden of God/the LORD," etc. (e.g., Gen 2:8, 9, 10, 15, 16; 3:1, 2, 3, 8 [twice], 10, 23, 24; 13:10; Num 24:6; Isa 51:3; Jer 36:5; Ezek 28:13; 33:8 [twice], 9; Joel 2:3), and (2) apocalyptic references that project "paradise" in eschatological terms as the "heavenly garden" (e.g., *T. Abraham* 20; *T. Levi* 28:10; *1 Enoch* 60:7-8; 61:12; *2 Enoch* 9:1-42:3; *Apoc. Abraham* 21:6-7; 4 *Ezra* 4:7-8).

23. Gk. ἀρρητα ῥήματα — a paradoxical juxtaposition, “unutterable utterances.” R. Spittler, “Ecstasy,” 263, notes that, “While *arrētos* doubtlessly comes from the vocabu-

Paul's "fourteen years ago"²⁵ must be calculated (by internal reckoning) from the time of writing this letter (c. A.D. 55), suggesting that this vision/revelation occurred c. A.D. 42, at which time Paul would have been in his native Syria-Cilicia (Gal 1:18, 21; 2:1; Acts 9:29-30; 11:25).²⁶ The nearest known supernatural parallels — (1) his visit from Antioch to Jerusalem "by revelation" (Gal 2:2), and (2) the missionary call from Antioch (Acts 13:1-3) — occurred c. A.D. 47, less than "fourteen years ago," apart from the unlikelihood that those events were connected with this experience. In reality, no other occurrence in Paul's life can be readily identified with his narrative in these verses.

As we have noted above (see on v. 1b), Paul was by no means unfamiliar with "visions and revelations from the Lord." One such vision had occurred in Corinth during his initial visit (Acts 18:9-10). Why does he not refer to that? The answer may be that he placed so much importance on the Lord's words spoken to him when the stake/thorn was given to him (v. 9). The experience of being "caught up" to the third heaven in apparent power was the necessary prelude to being brought down to earth in the weakness of the stake/thorn, where the dominical revelation of real power was given to

lary of mystery cults, the compound expression *arrēta rhēmata* appears to be unique to Paul." That they are ἄ οὐκ ἐξόν (ἐστίν should be understood, making this a periphrastic construction) indicates that they are more probably (1) "not lawful" than (2) "not able to be translated" (so Martin, 405-6). Various backgrounds — gnostic, rabbinic, and OT — have been sought in Paul's words, which, however, in our view, are written to rebut the newcomers' claims. Since Paul appears to be addressing Jewish "superlative" apostles (11:5; 12:11 = "false apostles"; 11:13, 22, 23), it appears more probable that such persons were influenced by current Palestinian religious phenomena, as reflected in Jewish apocalyptic literature (e.g., "In those days a whirlwind carried me off from the earth and set me down at the end of the heavens. And there I saw another vision . . ." — *I Enoch* 39:3ff.) and in the behavior of contemporary "sign-prophets" ("under the pretense of divine inspiration . . . persuaded the multitude to act like madmen" — *θειασμοῦ . . . δαίμονων τὸ πλῆθος ἐπειθον* — Josephus, *J.W.* 2.259-60). See P. W. Barnett, "Opposition," 3-17; *New Docs.* 3.45 has a reference to a "secret to be kept from the uninitiated."

24. Gk. οὐκ ἐξόν . . . λαλῆσαι; NIV, "not permitted to tell."

25. Gk. πρὸ ἐτῶν δεκατεσσάρων. Specific information of this kind is found in the prophetic and apocalyptic writings (e.g., Ezek 1:1-3; Amos 1:1; Hos 1:1; Isa 6:1; Jer 1:1-3; 26:1; 42:7; Zech 1:1; 2 Esdr 3:1, 2; 2 Apoc. Bar. 1:1). It is a coincidence that Gal 2:1 refers to δεκατεσσάρων ἐτῶν, which points back to Paul's apostolic call in c. A.D. 34, whereas this reference is to be located c. A.D. 42 (see the note following).

26. Based on an A.D. 33 date of the first Easter and the supposition that his Damascus road revelation occurred within two years of it (c. A.D. 34/35), we calculate that Paul came back to Jerusalem from Damascus (Gal 1:18) c. A.D. 36/37 and to Jerusalem from Antioch (Gal 2:1) c. A.D. 47/48. By this calculation his estimated time span in Cilicia would have been c. A.D. 37-46. The visionary experience "fourteen years ago," c. A.D. 42, appears to have occurred in Cilicia.

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him. Despite the grandeur of the experience, it was useless in authenticating his ministry; nothing he heard in Paradise was allowed to be told to others! Like the escape from Damascus, this event served to highlight his weaknesses. As it happens, the events reflected in 11:32–12:9 appear to have occurred in chronological sequence: *Damascus* (the escape down the wall), then *Tarsus* (“caught up to Paradise”).

By his brief story about “visions and revelations of the Lord” (v. 1; cf. “these surpassingly great revelations” — v. 7), Paul the narrator is attempting to establish the following: First, by his faintly humorous tone he is ridiculing his opponents’ attempt to achieve acceptance in Corinth by claims to paranormal experience. Paul the narrator knows this “man” because he is the man, yet he puts him at arm’s length from himself (v. 5);²⁷ his rivals may have been quite person-specific and detail-specific. Loftily he disdains to “know” whether this man’s journey to the third heaven — the highest heaven²⁸ — was in or out of the body,²⁹ a detail about which the counterclaimants may have made much capital. In any case, as he well knows, an event as distant as “fourteen years ago” is unlikely to compete with their more up-to-date claims. Rollercoaster-like, he has been “lowered down,” sharply “caught up,” then, finally and painfully, brought down and “buffeted.” He had been humiliatingly let down the Damascus wall in a net like so much merchandise (11:33), only to be powerfully whisked up to the heights of Paradise to hear the voice of God — the whole point of the experience³⁰

27. Paul uses the third person because of his unwillingness to boast about what he has done. As a “man ἐν Χριστῷ” Paul was one in whom *God* had wrought a new creation (5:17); therefore, Paul could not boast. So Furnish, 542–44; Martin, 398. Various forms of “arm’s-length” self-reference occur in both Jewish classical sources (see Bultmann, 220). Suggestions that Paul is actually referring to another person (e.g., Apollos) are to be rejected; vv. 6b–7a clearly refer to Paul.

28. There is some debate as to the number of heavens currently believed in; some sources suggest five, others ten, though seven heavens are referred to in both Jewish and later Christian writings (*Apoc. Moses* 35:2; 2 *Enoch* 3–20; *Ascension of Isaiah* 3:11; *Apoc. Paul* 29. See further C. Rowland, *Open Heaven*, 381). For two reasons, however, Paul is thinking here of the highest heaven: (1) the preposition ἕως implies “up to,” “the ultimate,” and (2) the supernal connotations of “Paradise” (v. 4), which is a synonym for “third heaven.”

29. In Jewish tradition those “caught up” were usually “in the body” — so Enoch (*1 Enoch* 12:1; 14:8; 39:3–4), Abraham (*T. Abr.* 8[B]), Seth (*Adam and Eve* 37:1), and Baruch (3 *Apoc. Bar.* 11:1–2). By contrast, in Greek thought, a journey to another realm is the *soul’s* flight from the body (see Plato, *Republic* 10.614B), as reflected in Jewish writers in the Hellenistic tradition (see, e.g., Philo, *Dreams* 1.36 and Josephus, *J.W.* 7.337–88).

30. Biblically, the first “ascent” was Enoch’s (*Gen* 5:24), the basis of much Jewish apocalyptic about “visits” to the heavenly realms. See G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, 17–18, for reference to the NT period and journeys to heaven by living venerated persons. The point of those journeys was to receive revelations usually available only after death.

— where, however, upon his return, the things he heard were unutterable because he was not allowed (by God) to speak.

Though he employs a somewhat grim humor, yet by no means does Paul denigrate this experience; he simply regards it as private and incommunicable. The verse supplies his own elaboration of his earlier remark, “If we are beside ourselves, it is for God” (5:13, RSV). He had not — apparently — ever referred to it. The “foolishness” of the Corinthians (and the opponents?) has “forced”³¹ him to talk about it; nonetheless, he does not reveal the “unutterable utterances” he heard, which he was not allowed to speak.

Second, this essentially negative narrative serves as a foil against which he will construct his wholly positive narrative (vv. 7-9) in which he heard words of the Lord, revelatory words that, unlike the ones mentioned above, he *is able* to speak.

Hence, to return to the subject of “boasting” — the point of the whole passage (vv. 1-10; see on v. 1) — he will not “boast” of the powerful man who had been caught up to “Paradise” but of the man brought down in weakness by the “stake/thorn” (vv. 7-9). This may be quite pointed, indeed, in regard to those who “classify and compare” themselves with Paul on these very grounds and find him “inferior.”

5-6a Having narrated ironically his revelationless vision, Paul now proceeds to put it into perspective in terms of his “Fool’s Speech.” Thus he picks up the major themes of the speech (11:1-12:13) — “boasting” (11:10, 12, 16, 17, 18, 30; 12:1), “weakness” (11:21, 29, 30), and “fool[ishness]” (11:1, 16 [twice], 17, 19, 23), using them now to prepare the way for his “boasting in weakness” (v. 9), the climax of this passage and, indeed, of the entire “Fool’s Speech.”

Using the language of “boasting” from v. 1, Paul now applies it directly to the previous narrative, where he distances himself from the man caught up to Paradise. In nicely balanced clauses he says (ironically), “About *such a person* I will boast,” but “About myself I will not boast,” to which he adds, “except in my weaknesses,” thus echoing 11:30. This is followed by a double explanatory clause that says, in effect — and unexpectedly — that if he were to boast in his revelations, that would not make him a fool, for he would be speaking the sober truth. But “So what?” is his point since, as he will go on to say, the only boasting that counts is the latter — boasting in his weaknesses.

He has narrated the account of the “man in Christ . . . caught up to Paradise” (vv. 2-4); clearly the man is Paul. Now, however, in regard to boasting Paul distinguishes between “this man” and “myself.” On behalf of

31. Gk. καυχᾶσθαι δεῖ (v. 1); ὑμεῖς με ἠναγκάσατε (v. 11).

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(*hyper*) "such a man"³² he "will boast,"³³ but on behalf of himself he will not boast, except "in weaknesses."³⁴ Should he choose to boast on behalf of that man, however, he would not be a "fool" because³⁵ he would be telling the truth.³⁶

Here, then, is another nuance in Paul's use of "fool" — (1) the opponents' mockery of Paul as a "fool," on account of his "weakness" (11:1, 16); (2) Paul's ironic self-reference to the boasting he must do (11:16, 17), which is, however, an inverted boasting in weakness (11:21, 23; 12:11); (3) Paul's reference to the adversaries' ill-treatment of the Corinthians (11:19-20); and (4) Paul's reference to the Corinthians as putting up with such treatment (11:19-20). To these he adds (5) that if ever he were to "boast" about such experiences, he would not be a fool (unlike them), because he tells the truth.

Let the Corinthians know that he was, in "truth," "caught up" in that remarkable vision/revelation of the Lord. But as such it was a private experience between himself and God and was neither to be communicated nor capitalized on in legitimating his ministry; he was not at liberty to divulge what he had heard (v. 4). This was between him and God (5:13).

6b While Paul will not boast of the man "caught up to Paradise," the strong inference is that he will boast of himself in another persona, that is, in the man the Corinthians actually "see" and "hear," namely, the apostle in his "weakness."

Whereas v. 6a is hypothetical ("If I shall wish to boast . . ."), v. 6b is dismissive of the very idea ("But³⁷ I refrain³⁸ . . ."). This, in turn, is followed by a negative statement of purpose:

32. Gk. τὸν τοιοῦτον could be neuter, "such an experience" (so, e.g., Luther, Moffatt). The context, however, requires the masculine and personal sense.

33. Gk. καυχῆσομαι, "I will boast." Paul also uses the future tense in 11:30.

34. Gk. ἐν ταῖς ἀσθενείαις, plural (as in 11:30; vv. 9b, 10 — but not v. 9a) and referring to the various sufferings and privations experienced in the course of ministry narrated in 11:23-33. Paul is not boasting of "weakness" considered in the abstract. The "weakness" of v. 9a relates to the concrete example of the thorn/stake.

35. Gk. γὰρ.

36. If Paul "boasts," he will not be a "fool" because he will speak the "truth." His speaking "the truth" is a probable side reference to his opponents, who are *pseudo* — *pseudo*-apostles (11:13), *pseudo*-brothers (11:26); unlike them, we infer, he does "not lie" (11:31). "The truth of Christ" is in him (11:10).

37. Gk. δέ.

38. Gk. φείδομαι, quite possibly an ironic reference, given that the Corinthians appear to be quite open to boasting of such experiences and would, perhaps, be glad to have Paul do some boasting, too.

lest anyone reckon

of me³⁹

The "boasting" from which he refrains was in regard to "such a man," the one "caught up to Paradise" (vv. 3-4), not "myself," about whom he will not "boast" except in "weakness" (vv. 5, 9). As such this verse serves as commentary on and elaboration of 5:12: "We are . . . giving you a cause to boast of us ["that we persuade men . . . in our right mind" — 5:11, 13], so that you may be able to answer *those who boast in 'face,' not in 'heart.'*"⁴¹ For Paul to "boast" of "such a man . . . caught up to Paradise" would be to "boast" of "face," to attempt to legitimate his ministry behind the mask of esoteric visions and revelations and their accompanying ecstatic speech.

Rather, let them relate to him (1) by ordinary observation, by what they "see" in him, that is, his "weaknesses," and (2) by what they "hear" from him,⁴² that is, by his preaching of Christ (cf. 1:19; 4:5; 5:11; 11:3-4). These two things that they "see" and "hear" — "weaknesses" and his preaching of Christ — are connected.⁴³ The "weaknesses" result from being the "minister of Christ" who suffers as a consequence of his preaching, as the catalogues of suffering make clear (4:5, 8-12; 6:3-10; 11:23-29).

Critical to this verse is the word "above" (Gk. *hyper*), the keyword to the extended passage in which the "superlative" apostles = the "false apostles" appear (10:12–12:13). *Hyper*, "above," "superior," appears to be their manner of self-presentation; *hyster*, "below," "inferior," their view and presentation of Paul. Ironically Paul turns their "boast" back on them; they are, in his ironic words, "superlative" apostles,⁴⁴ to whom, however, he is not "inferior"⁴⁵ (11:5; 12:11). Apparently, they boast that they are "superior" (*hyper*) in a number of ministry-related areas — fluency in speech (see on 11:5), and, in particular, in "visions and revelations from the Lord" (see on

39. Gk. εἰς ἐμὲ λογίσσεται, "think of me, form an estimate of me," an "unusual construction" according to Plummer, 346. See LXX Hos 7:15 for a close parallel.

40. My translation.

41. Gk. τοὺς ἐν προσώπῳ καυχωμένους καὶ μὴ ἐν καρδίᾳ (5:12). The “face” is known” to man, the “heart” to God (5:11; cf. 2:17; 4:2; 1:12-14, 23).

42. δ . . . [τις] ἀκούει . . . ἐξ ἐμοῦ.

43. It should be noted, however, that the pair “see” and “hear” is used elsewhere in an idiomatic sense (e.g., Isa 6:9; 29:18; Jer 5:21; Ezek 12:2; Matt 11:4; 13:14-15; Mark 8:18; Acts 8:6; 28:26-27), as well as by Paul (1 Cor 2:9; Rom 11:8; 15:21; Phil 4:9). However, here the precise objects με . . . ἐξ ἐμοῦ suggest a more intensive and personal use.

44. Gk. ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι; NIV, "super apostles."

45. Except, perhaps, in "speech" (11:6) and, ironically implied, in the exploitative behavior of the Corinthians (11:20-21)!

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12:2-4); Paul will “boast” of being “superior” only in suffering as “a minister of Christ” (“Ministers of Christ are they? I am better” — *hyper*; 11:23). Unlike them, he will not portray himself as a receiver of heavenly revelations so as to suggest that he is “above,” “more than” (*hyper*), by plain observation he is — a man of “weaknesses” — whose “weaknesses,” or sufferings, arise from his faithful preaching of Christ.

This part verse, when taken with 5:11-13, is important in establishing pointers to authentic Christian ministry. While individuals may, in the purposes of God, undergo various religious experiences, those experiences are between the person and God (5:13) and do not of themselves establish fitness for pastoral or missionary ministry. Based on these texts, the legitimating criteria include preaching Christ (5:12), which is not deterred by suffering and weakness (12:5), expressed out of a “right mind” (5:13). No one is to be judged beyond or apart from what one “sees” in or “hears” from that person (12:6b). What one sees in and hears from that minister is critical.

(b) The Thorn in the Flesh (12:7-10)

7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations,¹ there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.² 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my³ power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Paul now brings the “Fool’s Speech” to a conclusion, spelling out by way of specific narrative *why* he will boast of his weaknesses rather than his (non)-revelatory experience. The latter might exalt the apostle himself; the former serve to exalt Christ. At the same time it is hard not to see in the opening disclaimer (“to keep me from being elated”) a final indirect jab at the “superlative” but fraudulent apostles.

1. Some authorities (p⁴⁶ D) omit διό, which, however, should be retained since it is found in $\aleph$ A B and could be regarded as “the more difficult reading.”

2. The inclusion of ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι (“to keep me from being elated”) is supported by, e.g., p⁴⁶ B Ψ but not by, e.g., $\aleph^*$ A D G. The context suggests retention, to reinforce the point against the “superlative apostles.”

3. The best MS evidence (p⁴⁶ $\aleph$) omits “my” (so Metzger, 585-86).

Thus he declares that such an "abundance of revelations" (RSV) might have "over-uptifted" Paul in religious pride, as, apparently, they have so exalted his opponents. Against that possibility God has pinned Paul to the earth with the unidentified stake/thorn (*skolops*, v. 7). At that time Paul prayed for its removal and the Lord effectively replied in the negative, nonetheless promising his sustaining grace/power against his weakness (vv. 8-9). Thus having given them a revelatory story without a revelation, he now gives them a healing story without a healing. Finally, in an astonishing and unexpected turn, Paul declares that he boasts of his weaknesses, confident that this is the circumstance when Christ's power will rest upon him; when he is weak, then he is strong (vv. 9-10).

In this passage there is a complete reversal of the religious pride and the religious triumphalism of the "superlative" apostles. Genuinely apostolic ministry sustains "weaknesses . . . on behalf of Christ," replicating his sufferings yet finding power in ministry in dependence on him. There is no place for arrogance in ministry.

7 This complex sentence⁴ states (1) that,⁵ therefore,⁶ lest by an "abundance of revelations" Paul should be "over-uptifted" (in pride), a *skolops* (a "stake" or "thorn") in (or for) the flesh, a messenger of Satan, was given to him, (2) to buffet him, (3) lest he should be "over-uptifted." This verse is powerfully intentional; each of these elements is purposive⁷: the *skolops* was given to Paul lest he be "over-uptifted," to buffet him, lest he be "over-uptifted."⁸ It was God's will for Paul.

The "abundance of revelations,"⁹ when read with "visions and rev-

4. The awkwardly incomplete opening words of the verse have been taken with either (1) v. 5 ("I will not boast except in my weaknesses . . . and in the abundance of revelations"), or with (2) v. 6 ("but I refrain lest anyone should . . . and by reason of the abundance of revelations" — so Furnish, 528). But both options are against the flow of the argument. It is best, with Plummer, 347, to attribute the brokenness to incoherent dictation and to take the meaning to be, "And by reason of the abundance of revelations, wherefore, that I should not be 'over-uptifted,' there was given me a thorn in the flesh. . . ."

5. The initial καί is explicative, and translated, e.g., "That," or, as by Furnish, 528, "Specifically."

6. Gk. διό, "wherefore," which picks up the previous verse: "But I refrain lest anyone reckon of me above what he see in me or hears from me, wherefore, lest, by the the abundance of revelations, I be over-uptifted." Paul does not want "the abundance of revelations" to be "above" what the people "see" in him or "hear" from him so as to "over-uptift" Paul, i.e., exalt him in pride.

7. Gk. ἵνα μή . . . ἵνα . . . ἵνα μή.

8. The repetition of ἵνα μή υπεραίρωμαι frames the statement of v. 7b: "lest I be elated there was given to me a thorn for the flesh, a messenger of Satan lest I be elated."

9. Gk. τῇ ὑπερβολῇ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων. RSV, "abundance of revelations," is preferred to NIV, "surpassingly great revelations."

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elations of the Lord" (v. 1), indicates a considerable frequency of such exceptional phenomena (see on v. 1 for known examples). It is likely, however, that both references also mirror the claims of his opponents; his generalized exaggerations probably ridicule their boastfulness. Paul will give only one example of his own, which occurred fourteen years ago (v. 2)! That he has not been "over-uplifted" — bodily airborne — appears to reflect their testimony that they have been so "over-uplifted," by which Paul now means "uplifted in pride" (cf. 10:4-5). He is not, in truth, what they say they are!

The rarely used verb *hyperairōsthai* ("over-uplifted"¹⁰), like *hyperlian* ("very much more," "superlative," used with "apostles"¹¹ — 11:5; 12:11), is compounded with the preposition *hyper*, "over," "above," which is critical within his sustained and ironic polemic against the intruders (10:11–12:13). Paul takes their word *hyper* and turns it against them to expose both (1) the falsity of their claims, and (2) their superinflated view of themselves.

Paul, indeed, may have been, but did not remain, "over-uplifted." In this "abundance of revelations" — he does not say when (cf. v. 2) — there was also "given"¹² him (i.e., by God — divine passive) the *skolops*, for the very purpose that he might *not* be "over-uplifted." The verb tenses should be noted. The *skolops* was "given" (a completed action — aorist tense) in order that, as a messenger of Satan, it might continue to "buffet" (present tense) Paul lest he continue to be "over-uplifted" (present tense). Like his opponents, he has experienced "visions and revelations from the Lord . . . an abundance of revelations." But unlike them he has not remained "over-uplifted"; God brought him down to earth by his *skolops*, and kept him there, buffeting him. Meekness, gentleness, humility, patience, and endurance — the Christlike marks of an apostle, of which he has much to say in this letter¹³ — are connected with God's "gift" to him of the *skolops*.

But what is the *skolops*¹⁴? Few questions in the NT have excited greater interest. From early times to the present scholars continue to give their answers.¹⁵ A substantial library of opinion as to the nature of Paul's *skolops* has been created. However, two obstacles bar the way to a solution that can be confidently held: (1) the meaning of the word *skolops* itself is uncertain and, equally, (2) we can only guess at *who* or *what* Paul had in mind by his application of this word to himself. Indeed, it is possible that the Corinthians themselves did not know what he meant.

10. Gk. ὑπεραίρωσθαι; NIV, "conceited."

11. Gk. ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι.

12. Gk. ἐδόθη, aorist passive.

13. See 10:1; 4:5; 6:4; 12:12.

14. Gk. σκόλοψ.

15. See Hughes, 443-46; K. L. Schmidt, *TDNT* 3.820-21, for historical surveys on the meaning of the "thorn in the flesh."

In regard to the first barrier, the meaning of the word,¹⁶ the difficulty is that *skolops* was used both for a "stake" and for a "thorn." By derivation it meant "what is pointed,"¹⁷ hence a "stake," and was referred to at the time as, for example, an instrument of torture or execution (possibly equivalent to *stauros*, as in crucifixion¹⁸), or for spikes to impede a siege force. On this basis the word carries connotations of violence. However, the references in the LXX to *skolops* mean only "splinter" or "thorn," as, for example, when Moses warns of the consequences of not driving out the Canaanites: "... those you allow to remain will become barbs (*skolopes*) in your eyes" (Num 33:55; cf. Ezek 28:24; Hos 2:6). The context of v. 7 should help us decide between "stake" and "thorn" (or "splinter"), but the context itself is problematic.

Thus the second barrier to confident understanding is the point of the metaphor as used by Paul in this verse. Broadly speaking, Paul's reference has been thought to be either *physical* ([a] an illness, disfigurement, or disability, or [b] moral temptation)¹⁹ or *relational* (opposition to his ministry or persecution). The context of vv. 7-8 marginally favors a relational interpretation of the metaphor: (1) Paul immediately adds "*skolops* for the flesh,"²⁰ which is explained as "a messenger (*angelos*) of Satan" — *angelos* is generally personal in its use elsewhere by Paul; (2) the verb "buffet,"²¹ "beat with a fist," as, for example, by the soldiers of Jesus prior to the crucifixion (Mark 12:65 pars.; cf. 1 Pet 2:20), is generally interpersonal (but see 1 Cor 4:11); and (3) because the verb "take away"²² (v. 8) is used in the NT of persons, the pronoun (understood) would probably be masculine ("[take] him [away]").

16. See G. Delling, *TDNT* 7.409-24.

17. From Gk. σκάλλειν, "to hack."

18. The verbal forms ἀνασκολπίζειν and ἀνασταυροῦσθαι are interchangeable (G. Delling, *TDNT* 7.409-10).

19. Many suggestions have been made, such as (a), e.g., head or ear pain (Tertullian), eye trouble — based on Gal. 4:13, 14; 6:11 (E. Renan), malaria (W. M. Ramsay), epilepsy (J. B. Lightfoot), defective speech (W. K. L. Clarke). Against the "malady" hypothesis — in whatever specific form — is the consideration that Paul must have enjoyed remarkably good health to undertake the punishing regime of ministry mentioned earlier in his catalogue of sufferings (11:23-33). Regarding (b), whereas medieval interpreters favored a theory of sexual temptation, the Reformers favored spiritual temptation.

20. Gk. τῇ σαρκί; NIV, "in my flesh." Difficulties in resolving the meaning of the phrase add to the problems in this text. (1) "Flesh" could be Paul's "mortal existence" (4:11; Phil 1:24) or his body (7:5). (2) Because there is no ἐν, τῇ σαρκί is probably not "in the flesh" but "for the flesh," which could be a dative of advantage or of disadvantage. A parallel is 1 Cor 7:28 — those who marry will have "affliction for the flesh." On balance, Paul is not referring to his flesh, i.e., his skin, but about his mortal existence. The thorn, whatever it was, impacted on that.

21. Gk. κολαφίζῃ; NIV, "torment."

22. Gk. ἀφίσταναι.

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If, indeed, the *skolops* is relational, what — specifically — might it have been? Less likely is the suggestion that the *skolops* is the Corinthian church²³ (or a section thereof). More plausibly, Paul's *skolops* is the rise of the Judaizing, anti-Paul movement, such as was then all too obvious in Corinth. In favor of this possibility, we note that (1) such a view would be consistent with the chronological sequence implicit in this passage — the escape from Damascus (11:32-33) c. A.D. 34/35, the "Paradise" experience (12:2-4) c. A.D. 42, and now, on this hypothesis, the rise of the anti-Pauline mission c. A.D. 47 (Gal 2:1, 4-5, 12-14); (2) the *skolops* as a "messenger of Satan" is matched by the false apostles who are "ministers of Satan" (11:15), false brothers who are the source of danger (see on 11:26); and (3) in the LXX, as noted above, *skolops* is used of the enemies of Israel (Num 33:55; Ezek 28:24), making the present opponents the enemies of the true Israel of God and of Paul his minister (cf. Gal 6:16).

On grounds of historical analysis, however, the truth is that we do not have enough unambiguous information to do more than speculate on the nature of Paul's *skolops*. It is hard to choose between the chief options, the *physical* or the *relational*; there are weak points in both (e.g., [a] the difficulty that so robust a man as Paul evidently was (see on 11:23-33) could at the same time be physically debilitated, or [b] understanding that Paul's "messenger of Satan" [singular] could apply to a *group* or *movement*, or [c] that Paul would say that *God* gave him something as evil as the Judaizing movement [see on 11:13-15]). Neither hypothesis is without questions, whichever one favors.

Doubtless speculations will continue to be made. Pastorally, however, it may be to our advantage not to know. The very openness of the identification allows wide possibilities of personal application to a broad range of personal suffering, which precise identification might limit.

This verse expresses a supreme paradox. A painful *skolops* — whatever it actually was — was "given" to Paul, and that by *God*! This is expanded upon as "a messenger of [or from] Satan." The juxtaposition of "was given [by God]" and "messenger of Satan" recalls the early chapters of Job, where God allows Satan to afflict Job's household (Job 1:12), then his person (Job 2:6-7). This language suggests (1) that Satan was the immediate cause of Paul's difficulty — symbolized by the word *skolops*; (2) that, because the *skolops* was given by God, Satan is subject to God, not his equal (as in dualism); and (3) that in a profoundly mysterious way God was the ultimate source of that *skolops*. Paradoxically, *God* is the invisible source of this suffering in the life of Paul, his child and minister.

23. According to J. McCant, "Paul's Thorn," 572, it is "the Corinthian church's rejection of the legitimacy of Paul's apostolate."

Such inferences demand justification and resolution such as have already been given (the twice-stated “that I might not be ‘over-uptified’”) and which Paul now proceeds to elaborate further (vv. 9-10).

8 Now follows Paul’s account of his prayer to the Lord; his answer to the prayer will be given in the next verse. Edifyingly for his readers then — and now — Paul reveals that his response to the stake/thorn was to pray.

Concerning this

three times

I prayed²⁴ to the Lord

that

he might remove [him]

from me.

Who is the Lord to whom he prayed, the “Lord Christ” or the “Lord God”? His reference to “my power . . . Christ’s power” (v. 9) indicates that it was to the Lord Jesus Christ that he turned in prayer. That Paul can make this statement without further comment shows that both he and his readers understood that they could pray to the glorified Jesus as well as to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ;²⁵ Christ’s deity is implied by such a reference (see on 2:12; 3:16; 4:6; cf. 8:5, 19, 21).

His “three times” stands in parallel with Jesus’ threefold prayer to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:41).²⁶ Possibly “three times” was a conventional symbol for repeated prayer (so Chrysostom). Threefold actions appear to have been customary in matters relating to piety (cf. John 21:17; Acts 10:16); prayer was offered three times a day (Ps 55:16-17; Dan 6:10, 13). The aorist tense “I prayed” matches the aorist tense “[a thorn] . . . was given”²⁷; the singular onset of the stake/thorn was met with Paul’s singular (thrice-repeated) prayer to the Lord. That tense may also suggest that, in the light of the Lord’s answer, which he continues to hear (v. 9), the time for prayer had passed. It was now a matter of acceptance of the Lord’s will.

The content of that prayer was that God should remove “him” (i.e., the “messenger of Satan” — v. 8) from Paul. Given Paul’s use elsewhere, the

24. Only here in the NT is παρακαλοῦν used in petitionary prayer. It is, however, to be found in Hellenistic contexts (see Furnish, 529).

25. Cf. 1 Thess 3:11-13. See further R. J. Bauckham, “Worship of Jesus in Apocalyptic Christianity,” 322-41; R. T. France, “Worship of Jesus,” 16-36.

26. J. McCant, “Paul’s Thorn,” 571, sees a number of parallels between Paul and Jesus, e.g., (1) Jesus faced a σταυρός, Paul a σκόλοψ; (2) both prayed three times; (3) Jesus prayed, “not my will but thine . . .”; Paul heard the Lord say, “My grace is sufficient”; (4) Jesus was crucified; Paul received no healing; and (5) Jesus was rejected — as Messiah — by his “own”; Paul’s “own” church rejected him — as an apostle (11:4).

27. Gk. ἐδόθη . . . παρεκάλεσα.

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verb "remove" requires a personal object ("him"²⁸), not an impersonal object ("it"), supporting the possibility that the stake/thorn was relational in character (see v. 7).

9a Christ's reply to Paul's prayer must be seen as the climax not only of this passage (12:1-10) and of the "Fool's Speech" (11:1-12:13), but in some ways of the entire Second Letter to the Corinthians. Whatever the stake/thorn was, and however great its pain for Paul, he testifies that the "grace" of Christ was "sufficient" in dealing with it. This was the Lord's reply to Paul's prayer.

Earlier Paul related that in Asia he had been "beyond power . . . crushed" (1:8), how, more generally, as a mere "jar of clay," he was dependent on "the all-surpassing power of God" (4:7). Now he declares that "[Christ's] power is made perfect in weakness."²⁹ Power in weakness, therefore, runs as a thread throughout the letter, reaching its most powerful expression here. Accordingly, we agree with Hughes that Christ's reply to Paul is "the summit of the epistle" (451).

We do not know how, or by what process, that reply came to Paul, except that it was in the context of prayer, and, we suggest, also upon reflection on the central truths of the gospel of the death and resurrection of Christ proclaimed by Paul.

It is likely that Paul knew of and reflected upon the events of the last twenty-four hours of Jesus' life, both his threefold prayer to his Father in Gethsemane (see on v. 8) and his (apparent) powerlessness to save himself as he was dying on the cross. The words spoken at the cross, literally "he *saved* others; himself he is *not powerful to save*" (Mark 15:31), resonate in Paul's words that "Christ crucified" is "the *power* of God . . . the *weakness* of God" (1 Cor 1:21, 23-25). The powerful salvation of God had been wrought in the powerless crucified One.

In words evocative of Good Friday and Easter Paul observes that Christ, who was "crucified in *weakness* . . . lives by the *power* of God," and that believers, "by God's *power*, live with [Christ]" (13:4).

Christ's death and life are reproduced in the lives of his people. God's power through Christ's weakness in *death* by crucifixion issues in the "crucifixion" of Paul's inflated pride, by means of the thorn/stake. God's power, which caused Christ to be alive in resurrection and believers with him, issues in the power of Christ experienced in the patience, endurance, meekness, and

28. There is no object of the verb "remove." That the object, understood, is "him," i.e., "a messenger of Satan," rather than the "thorn/stake," is the most natural reading given the flow of the text between vv. 7 and 8.

29. Gk. ἡ γὰρ δύναμις ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελεῖται, "For power is made perfect in weakness." NIV, "for my power. . ."

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his people is expressed in, and is inseparable from, his power. To be shown the one is to be given the other. But this power is “perfected,” becomes a reality, in *weakness*, of which the thorn/stake “given” to Paul is a concrete example.

The second half of the couplet may well mirror — but so as to correct — the doctrine of the “superlative” apostles, namely, that God’s power was brought to completion in the power of ecstatic experience, such as Paul could point to, but which he now discounts (v. 6). By that understanding it would be “power in power.” Christ’s power — as now imparted to him by the *risen* Lord — only arose out of his powerlessness in crucifixion. In the divine dispensation there had to be weakness (crucifixion) before there was power (resurrection). In the thinking of the triumphalist opponents, however, there is no crucifixion, no weakness, only a valuing of power (see on 2:14; 4:16-17). But the onset of the stake/thorn provoked Paul to pray, and, in all probability, to reflect on the weakness and powerlessness of Christ in crucifixion and the power of Christ in resurrection. In consequence the Lord told Paul that his resurrection power in this age is perfected in weakness, that is, in the weakness of the stake/thorn that is not taken away.

These words of Christ to Paul should not be limited in their application to Paul as an apostle (see on 3:18; 4:16-5:10) but apply to whatever experiences and circumstances of life render powerless the children of God (see on 12:19). The one thing denied to them, which is exactly what most people demand above all, is to control their own destiny. As children of Adam, despite such this-worldly instruments of power as they may wield — intellect, health, wealth, influence, or position — they do, sooner or later, become powerless and vulnerable. Upon such persons, who in their powerlessness — whether bodily, relational, financial, or structural — call out to the Lord, the grace of Christ is shown and the power of Christ rests. The words of the Lord spoken to Paul, then, are universally applicable. They do not, however, call for resignation, which is passive and impersonal, but for acceptance, which is active and obedient to the Lord, who, in response to our prayer, continues to say, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

9b-10 The conjunctions “Therefore . . . wherefore”³⁴ at the beginning of v. 9b and v. 10 respectively signal Paul’s own responses to the Lord’s reply to him (v. 9a). Because Christ’s power is made perfect in weakness, (1) *therefore* he will all the more gladly boast in weaknesses. (2) *Wherefore* he takes pleasure in weaknesses.

34. Gk. οὖν . . . διό.

It should be noted that Paul does not boast in "weakness," that is, in feebleness. The plural "in my weaknesses" (v. 9b³⁵) points to the sufferings "for Christ" listed in 11:23-33, whereas the "weakness," singular, of v. 9a, the stake/thorn "given" to him by God (v. 7), was the climactic example.

The words "I will boast *rather*"³⁶ of weaknesses sound a comparative note. To what is he preferring this "boasting"? In all probability he is recalling once more his flight to Paradise (vv. 4-5). This experience truly occurred; Paul would be a "fool" to deny it. But that experience did not make Paul "more" (*hyper*) than he is in reality, either as to the "weaknesses" people "see" in him or the word of God they "hear" from him (v. 6). Such an experience, astonishing though it doubtless was, does not accredit his apostleship. He will make nothing of it, that is, "boast of it." "Rather" than boast of his ecstatic, (non)-revelatory experience, he "will most gladly"³⁷ boast of his "weaknesses."

He then gives the purpose³⁸ for his preferred boast, namely, that Christ's power "may rest on"³⁹ him. Remarkably, this is the vocabulary of the tabernacle of the old covenant as applied to God "pitching his tent" with his people (Exod 40:34). In turn, this imagery is employed within the NT to describe (1) the incarnate life of the Word of God ("The Word became flesh and dwelt [i.e., 'pitched his tent'] among us" — John 1:14), and (2) God's future dwelling with his people (Rev 7:14; 12:12; 13:6; 21:3). In what has been described as a "bold metaphor,"⁴⁰ Paul teaches that Christ in his power "pitches his tent" with his saints in their weaknesses.⁴¹ Ecstasy has all the appearances of divine power; but the reality is otherwise. Christ draws near to us, and gives his grace and power to us, in weakness.

In v. 10 Paul expresses his "acceptance of"⁴² various difficulties, beginning with "in weaknesses," which is repeated from v. 9b and refers

35. Gk. ἐν ταῖς ἀσθενείαις μου, noting the ἐν, which is repeated in v. 10, "in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, [in] difficulties." The use of ἐν + sufferings was prominent in sufferings listed in 6:4-7 and 11:26-27.

36. Gk. μᾶλλον.

37. Gk. ἥδιστα, "most gladly," the superlative of ἡδέως, "gladly."

38. Gk. ἵνα.

39. Gk. ἐπισκηνώσῃ ἐπ' represents a Semitic love of repetition — ἐπὶ . . . ἐπ[ὶ].

40. Plummer, 355.

41. *Contra* Furnish, 531, who points out that (1) the verb ἐπισκηνοῦν is found only here in the NT and not at all in the LXX, (2) the noun σκηνή is used in OT (LXX) passages, and (3) noting the rarity of ἐπισκηνοῦν may mean that it was taken over from the opponents. In view of the close similarity between ἐπισκηνοῦν and σκηνοῦν and the appearance of the latter in LXX Gen 13:12; Judg 5:17; 8:11; 1 Kings 8:12, it seems reasonable to see Paul's use of the word as evocative of the OT tabernacle imagery.

42. Gk. εὐδοκῶ; NIV, "delight in." According to Furnish, 531, the verb εὐδοκεῖν means "something less than 'take delight in'" but "something more than 'be content with,'" hence my "acceptance of."

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specifically to the stake/thorn. Following "weaknesses" are: (1) "in insults"⁴³ — found only here in Paul's writings (possibly they refer to the scandalous treatment of him as a Roman citizen by Romans and as an Israelite by Jews — see 11:24-25), (2) "in hardships"⁴⁴ (lit. "necessities" — see on 6:4), (3) "in persecutions"⁴⁵ (as described in 11:24-25; cf. Rom 8:35), and (4) "[in] difficulties"⁴⁶ (lit. "tight corners"; cf. 6:4; the verb occurs in 4:8; 6:12).

Critical to v. 10 is the inferential "wherefore,"⁴⁷ which picks up from the immediately preceding⁴⁸ "I will boast . . . of my weaknesses," which, "on behalf of Christ,"⁴⁹ he accepts. The expression "*on behalf of Christ* I accept weaknesses, etc." must be read alongside "*we beseech you on behalf of Christ*, 'be reconciled to God'" (5:20). Because Christ is not physically present, in his place God "has given" the ministry and "entrusted" the word of reconciliation to the apostles (5:18-19). As Christ's ambassador and apostle, Paul "beseeches" in Christ's place and suffers in Christ's place, as this list of sufferings shows (cf. 4:8-9; 6:4-5; cf. 2:16). Christ's sufferings are replicated and historically extended in the sufferings or *weaknesses* of his apostle as he bids humankind "Be reconciled to God," and it is of these — as opposed to triumphalist "visions and revelations" — that Paul "boasts" (v. 9b) and these that he "accepts."

A connection should also be made between "weaknesses . . . *on behalf of Christ*" and his words "be spent *on behalf of* your souls," a few verses later (see on v. 15). In both cases the preposition *hyper* is used. As apostle of divine reconciliation Paul suffers on behalf of the One he represents — though in a qualitatively different way (see on 5:21) — and he does so for the sake of those to whom he ministers. The keyword of the triumphalist "superlative"

43. Gk. ἐν ὕβρεσιν. See 1 Thess 2:2 for the verb ὑβρίζειν: "we had . . . been shamefully treated in Philippi."

44. Gk. ἐν ἀνάγκαις.

45. Gk. ἐν διωγμοῖς.

46. Gk. στενοχωρίαις.

47. Gk. διό.

48. *Contra* Martin, 422, who sees διό as connected with the διό of v. 7.

49. Gk. ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ; NIV, "for Christ's sake." Furnish, 531, places ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ — although coming at the end of the list — with the verb εὐδοκῶ at the beginning. He takes ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ with the verb, not with Paul's hardships. In his view, "*because* Christ's power is made present in weakness," Paul is content *for Christ's sake*. However, it is better to connect ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ with Paul's weaknesses — "I am content, therefore, in weaknesses . . . *on behalf of Christ*." Moreover, ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ is representational, i.e., Paul's "weaknesses" in ministry are "*on Christ's behalf*," "*in Christ's place*." This important phrase also appears at 5:20, where Paul beseeches, "ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, 'be reconciled to God,'" a parallel not noticed by, e.g., Furnish, 531, or Martin, 422. In passing, a distinction should be noticed between διὰ Ἰησοῦν — 4:5, 11 ("on account of Jesus") and ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ — 5:20; 12:10 ("for," or "in place of Christ").

apostles (11:5; 12:11) is *hyper* ("more than," "above") Paul. It is Paul's keyword, too. Madman that he is, his "weaknesses" are "more than" theirs (11:23), and those "weaknesses" replicate Christ's sufferings, and do so on behalf of the churches. His nontriumphalist, servant ministry is again undergirded. He is their "slave" on account of (*dia*) Jesus (4:5).

Paul concludes the two parts of vv. 9b-10 with an aphorism: "When I am weak, then I am strong."⁵⁰ Such strength is not automatic to weakness. Rather, weakness (as of the unremoved stake/thorn — v. 7) creates the human context of helplessness and utter vulnerability in which Paul the minister of Christ pleaded with the risen, powerful Lord — who himself was once utterly "weak," "sin-laden," and "poor" (13:4; 5:21; 8:9) in achieving our reconciliation with God — who is now strong in resurrected power to give his grace and power to the one who calls out to him.

c. The "Fool's Speech": Epilogue (12:11-13)

11 I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the "super-apostles," even though I am nothing. 12 The things that mark an apostle — signs, wonders and miracles — were done among you with great perseverance. 13 How were you inferior to the other churches, except that I was never a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!

In these few verses Paul applies the "Fool's Speech" begun at 11:1. There is a reproachful tone to be heard here, similar to 11:7, 19; the Corinthians, who ought to have commended him, have forced him to speak like a "fool" in praising himself. Nonetheless, he is not inferior to the "superlative" apostles, God having wrought the signs of the apostle through him in Corinth. Because he is not inferior, the Corinthians have been at no disadvantage to other churches in "signs, wonders and miracles" of divine origin, attesting his apostolicity. Only in one respect have they been worse off; he has not been a financial burden to them!

The repetition of aorist tense verbs in the successive verses ("I am [not] inferior. . . . [The signs of the apostle] were wrought. . . . [How] were you inferior?"), each signifying singular action, points strikingly to Paul's historic ministry in the Achaian capital. Paul is focusing the attention of the Corinthians on the fact and manner of the founding of the church in that place.

Here we see through a window into Paul's apostolic ministry in

50. A remote parallel may be seen in Philo's comment on what Moses learned at the burning bush: "Your weakness is your power" (*On the Life of Moses* 1.69).

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Corinth: (1) God's working "the signs of the apostle" attesting the apostolicity of Paul to the Corinthians, and (2) Paul laboring to support himself that he might not be a "burden" to them (see on 11:12). Both (1) and (2) mark the turning of the aeons, the dawn of the day of salvation (6:2) in which the apostle had a unique and unrepeatable role.

11 Here Paul completes the ring of references to "foolishness," begun at the opening of the "Fool's Speech" (11:1; cf. 11:16 [twice], 17, 19, 23; 12:6). This verse consists of (1) a reproach to the Corinthians ("I have become a fool"), as explained¹ by (2) his reason ("For I ought to have been commended by you"), followed by (3) an amplification ("For in nothing am I less than the "superlative" apostles).

The reproach, which is deeply felt, is specifically directed from Paul to the Corinthians, as the emphatic pronouns indicate: "It was *you* who compelled *me*, for *I* ought to have been commended by *you*."² Poignant is his "I ought — I had a *right*³ — to have been commended by you." Paul needed no letter of recommendation; the Corinthians were Christ's "letter," known and read by everybody (3:2; 10:7; cf. 6:4). They themselves were the Lord's commendation (cf. 10:18). Paul ought not to have been forced to speak as a fool in demonstrating his apostolate.⁴

Rather, the Corinthians have been drawn aside to these "superlative" apostles in preference to Paul (see on 11:5). In continuing his reproach to the Corinthians, Paul ironically mirrors the "superior"/"inferior" vocabulary of these opponents: "In nothing was I inferior to these 'superlative' apostles."⁵ They are *hyper* and Paul *hyster*, a claim that Paul in no way concedes, as he will proceed to demonstrate in the next verse. The aorist tense of the verb "was I inferior," being singular in import, points to the time of Paul's sojourn in Corinth.⁶

1. The explanatory γάρ appears twice in this verse.

2. So Plummer, 357; Gk. ὑμεῖς με . . . ἐγὼ . . . ὑφ' ὑμῶν.

3. Gk. ὀφείλον.

4. It is possible that Paul's "foolish boasting" has roots in contemporary cultural convention. Appeal is made to Hellenistic authors, e.g., Plutarch, "On Praising Oneself Inoffensively," 1, and Livy, *History* 33.49.6, to locate patterns that might assist in locating Paul's presentation. From these authors it appears that self-praise is justified when the truth must be told in self-defense where false accusations have been made. But it is less likely that Paul had read such authors than that he is reflecting unwritten culture found in them. See further the note to 11:1.

5. Gk. οὐδὲν γὰρ ὑστέρησα τῶν ὑπερλίαν ἀποστόλων.

6. The contrast is *meanful* only in regard to "superlative" apostles such as those who, like Paul, have visited Corinth. This is relevant to the question whether the "superlative" apostles and the "false apostles" are to be differentiated or equated. Those who argue for their differentiation propose that the "superlative" apostles are the preeminent, Jerusalem-based apostles. But the inference here is that the "superlative" apostles are now

Nonetheless, Paul must immediately qualify this comment. This he does by repeating the emphatic negative, "in no single thing."⁷ He began the sentence, "in *nothing* am I inferior . . . ;" he now concludes, "even though I am nothing." To be sure, he is inferior "in no single thing," yet — in all humility — he is "no single thing." This qualification flows into the next verse, where its real significance is seen. In fact, "the signs of the apostle" mark him out as an apostle, making him in fact superior to those he calls "superlative" apostles. Thus the disclaimer is a veiled claim in the form of litotes (understatement); in saying that he is nothing, at the same time he is saying that he is everything. Nonetheless, he upholds the canons of Christian humility (cf. 10:1), and as he proceeds to infer, it is God, not he, who validates his ministry because God is the source of what he does.

12 Paul proceeds at once to demonstrate how he was simultaneously "in nothing inferior" while he himself was "nothing." He was "in nothing inferior" because, as he now reminds them, the "signs of an apostle" occurred in Corinth. But he is also "nothing" because these were performed by God in the context of Paul's great endurance of weaknesses.

The initial "Truly" or "Indeed"⁸ introduces the explanation for the final part of the previous verse. Paul is not inferior in anything to the "superlative" apostles, though he himself is nothing, precisely because he is the instrument of God, no less. This is made clear by the (divine) passive of the verb "were done"⁹; *God* wrought the "signs" of which Paul speaks. Moreover, the three terms amplifying "the signs of the apostle" are in the dative case, indicating instrumental use, as if to say "by signs, by wonders, by miracles"¹⁰ did *God* attest Paul's apostleship in Corinth. It is because God was the effective means of these "signs" that Paul can say (v. 11), paradoxically, that (1) he is "not inferior," and that (2) he is "nothing."

The carefully chosen words "the signs of the apostle" suggest that there was a class of persons known as "apostles" who were demonstrated to be such by "the signs."¹¹ Thus "the signs" accredit Paul as truly "an apostle,"¹² one of the apostles, that unique body from the era closest to Christ,

in Corinth, in which case they cannot be identified as apostolic leaders in Jerusalem. These men have come to Corinth, and they are the same as the "false apostles" (11:13), under a different name. (See on 11:5.)

7. Gk. οὐδέν.

8. Gk. μέν. For the concessive use μέν of see A. T. Robertson, *Grammar*, 1151.

9. Gk. κατεργάσθη. See also Rom 15:18.

10. Gk. σημείοις . . . τέρασιν . . . δυνάμεσιν.

11. Gk. τὰ σημεία.

12. The articular noun ἀποστόλου refers to the whole class of apostles; so A. T. Robertson, *Grammar*, 408. Furnish, 553, renders σημεία τοῦ ἀποστόλου as "The Apostolic Signs."

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who, along with the prophets, were the foundation of the new covenant people of God (Eph 2:20). "The signs," which are miracles pointing to God as their author,¹³ are the demonstration that Paul was precisely that, one of the select group of the apostles. He is exactly what the professed "apostles of Christ" now come to Corinth are not. They are "pseudo," *false* apostles (11:13); he truly is an apostle. "The signs" establish that. His present reference to "signs, wonders and miracles" in Corinth was not, apparently, a point of superiority claimed by the "superlative" apostles. Rather, Paul, having denied any "inferiority" to them (12:11), can merely point to his apostolic miracles at the time he first came to Corinth to clinch outright, and without further argument, his claim to apostolicity. On this understanding, Paul's miracles — and the "superlative" apostles' lack of them — were an indisputable demonstration of his authentic apostleship.

But this claim is incomplete. To it Paul adds the very significant qualification that such "signs" were wrought (by God) "in all — preferably, *utmost* — endurance"¹⁴ (see on 6:4). The divinely wrought miracles occurred in the context of gospel ministry (cf. 1:19) and therefore of "weaknesses" (as listed in 11:23-33; cf. 12:9-10), and thus of "endurance" in the face of affliction. Miracles were one part of the badge of the apostle; endurance was the other. Thus the apostle replicates and continues the pattern of the Master who sent him; he, too, worked "signs" — though to an infinitely greater degree — with "endurance" in circumstances of suffering. Against the "superlative" apostles who may have thought that power alone accredited them as "apostles . . . ministers of Christ" (see on 11:15, 23; 12:2-4), Paul asserts that power — *God's* power — is exercised in weakness.

Such "signs" were wrought . . . among you,"¹⁵ that is, in Corinth. The Corinthians to whom he now writes must have witnessed these,¹⁶ a further reason for his pained disclosure of the previous verse, "I ought to have been commended by you." Thus the contrast between Paul and the "superlative" apostles explicit in vv. 11 and 13 must be between Paul and "apostles" who also have come to Corinth, that is, the "false apostles" (see on 11:13). Clearly, the "superlative" apostles are the "false apostles." The other hypothesis, that

13. See K. H. Rengstorff, *TDNT* 7.258-60. The suggestion that "the signs of the apostle" include, e.g., missionary conversions or a Christlike life (e.g., by Martin, 434-35) is overturned by the explicatory triad that follows: "signs, wonders, miracles."

14. Gk. ἐν πάσῃ ὑπομονῇ (NIV, "with great perseverance").

15. Gk. ἐν ὑμῖν.

16. Here is clear evidence that God used Paul as an instrument of miraculous works. To make this statement in an almost gratuitous manner to readers who were, to say the least, unsympathetic is strong reason for believing that such miracles did occur. No one knew better than Paul that to make claims that were untrue would be a sure way to discredit him as a charlatan.

the "superlative" apostles were the distant apostles of Jerusalem,¹⁷ makes no sense here.

Although Acts 18 records no miracle of Paul during his sojourn in Corinth, the amplifying phrase "signs, wonders and miracles" demands that a significant manifestation of miraculous activity occurred there at the hands of the apostle. The same three terms, "signs, wonders and miracles," are also found together in Acts 2:22; 2 Thess 2:9; and Heb 2:4 (cf. Rom 15:19). "Signs and wonders" is a recurring phrase in the OT, often in connection with the great saving event of the Exodus.¹⁸ To this common OT duo Paul adds "deeds of power," a term he uses elsewhere for miracles (1 Cor 12:10, 28, 29; Gal 3:5). The effect of giving this triad as "the signs of the apostle" is to tie the apostle to God's great redemptive event under the new covenant, focused on Christ's death and resurrection. "Signs and wonders" mark the Exodus; "signs, wonders and miracles" mark the death and resurrection of Jesus as at the first Easter and its apostolic proclamation.

13 Now appealing to their firsthand experience of "the signs of an apostle," Paul asks, "For¹⁹ how were you inferior²⁰ to the other churches. . . ?" Once more the aorist verb, signifying singular action, points to Paul's historic sojourn in Corinth (cf. other aorists in v. 11 — "... was I inferior," and in v. 12 — "were wrought"). "The signs of the apostle" were wrought by God in "the other churches," including, and to no lesser degree, the church of Corinth (cf. 1:19).

His very question makes it clear that in regard to the divine outpouring of supernatural attestation of the apostle, the Corinthians did not come behind the other churches. Paul's line of reason is apparent. "If you were not inferior" in "the signs of the apostle," as clearly you were not, then I am not "inferior" (v. 11) in apostolicity, despite what the "superlative" apostles say and some of you are tending to believe (see on v. 11; 11:5).

Verses 12-13, when read with 1:19; 4:5; 5:20 (and 11:4), give a clear picture of apostolic pioneer evangelism in Corinth, marking the dawn of the day of salvation (6:2). Here, on the one hand, is the apostolic proclamation of the Son of God in fulfillment of all the promises of God accompanied by the anointing of the Holy Spirit (1:19-21; cf. on 3:3; 5:5; 11:4; 13:14); here, on the other, is the attestation from heaven of "the signs of the apostle — signs,

17. As, e.g., in Barrett, 320.

18. As, e.g., in Exod 7:3; cf. 1:9, 10; 3:20; 8:23; 10:1, 2; 15:11; Num 14:21; Deut 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 26:8; 29:3; Josh 3:5; 24:17; Ps 135:9; Neh 9:10; Jer 32:21. See further D. A. Carson, "Signs and Wonders," 89-118.

19. Gk. γάρ.

20. Gk. ἡσώθητε, from ἡσώομαι ("I am defeated"); this verb is found only here in the NT. "Less favored" (RSV) indicates that a different verb from v. 11 ("was . . . inferior") is being used.

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wonders, miracles." And all the while the apostle works to support himself so as not to burden the Corinthians, to which he now turns with powerful irony.

There is indeed an exception in one area of "inferiority." He concludes his question: "*except* that I myself [stated with emphasis²¹] was not a burden to you?" In regard to financial support Paul is emphatic. He did not "burden"²² the Corinthians, though others — the "false apostles" (11:13, 20) — we infer, have done that. Here is the one place — or the second (he did not abuse them, either; 11:20-21) — where his ministry is inferior to theirs!

He completes the verse — and, indeed, the entire "Fool's Speech" — with the heavily ironical supplication, "Forgive me this injustice."²³ This is closely parallel with the earlier, "Was it a sin for me to lower myself. . . ?" (see on 11:7). Since he "lowered himself" in self-supporting labor and received assistance from the Macedonian churches, the Corinthians felt that Paul had acted "unjustly" against them. While Paul had his own personal and theological reasons for refusing their support (see on 11:12), the Corinthians felt that it was their place to support him. Perhaps they felt demeaned by the humiliation of his labor. Culturally, the visiting rhetorician would assume a patronizing role, and the Corinthians appear to have been offended that he would not follow such conventions.

As is his method, Paul introduces into the end of a section a theme that he will pick up and expand upon in the new section,²⁴ in this case that he has not been nor will he be "a burden" to them.

C. PREPARATION FOR THE IMMINENT THIRD VISIT (12:14-13:14)

1. I Will Not Be a Burden to You (12:14-19)

14 Now I am ready to visit you for the third time,¹ and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but

21. Gk. αὐτὸς ἐγώ (see also on 10:1).

22. Gk. κατενάρκησα — the same verb as in 11:9 (q.v.).

23. Gk. χάρισασθέ μοι τὴν ἀδικίαν ταύτην. For ἀδικίαν the NIV has "wrong." The irony may be seen in that Paul himself was "wronged" (ἀδικηθέντος) in Corinth by a Corinthian man, and the Corinthians had been slow to redress the injustice (7:12; cf. 2:5, 10, 11). Note that ἀδικία is used elsewhere for moral wickedness (e.g., Rom 1:18, 29).

24. For other examples see how 2:12 leads into 2:14ff.; 7:4 into 7:5; and 7:16 into 8:8-15.

1. Gk. τρίτον τοῦτο is doubtless right order (so, e.g., ⋈ A B F G), though some MSS reverse the order or omit τοῦτο.