

Notes on

Paulus' Second Letter to the Corinthians

Authorship and Date

The letter was written by Paulus of Tarsus. Some time has passed since his first letter to the messianic Jews in Korinth. It is 55 CE now. The timing connects with the end of the famine relief effort that Paulus had been undertaking since the year 52. The letter likely follows Paulus' first letter to Timotheos but precedes his letter to Titus.

Structure

Many commentators believe that 2nd Corinthians consists of fragments of two letters -- a "harsh" letter and a succeeding "gentle" letter. Some even believe that there are several letters in this one. The tone of the letter certainly appears to shift back and forth. Throughout most of chapters 10 - 13, Paulus describes a conflict between himself and members of the group. In that section he defends himself against charges made by certain people in Korinth, and the atmosphere is somewhat tense. On the other hand, the mood is entirely different throughout much of chapters 2 - 9. There, Paulus appears to reflect on his earlier harsh words and provide comforting advice to the Corinthians. He also provides information about the promised assistance to the poor famine victims in Jerusalem.

Others, hoping to maintain the integrity of the letter, opine that the "harsh letter" is not extant, whereas 2 Corinthians follows that letter. They would assert, then, that some of the conflict had yet to be resolved. This "lost letter" theory raises other questions -- such as why Paulus would have responded to criticism in this later letter but not in the earlier harsh one. Had it not yet arisen, for the issues seem to have been ongoing?

This commentary adopts a third, intermediary, view. The letter is a unit, but the order of the sheets of papyrus in the letter was accidentally reorganized at an early date. Thus, the "harsh" portion of the letter was intended to precede the later words of consolation. Under this theory Paulus, realizing that he has written some harsh things, counters that tone with more gentle advice, concluding his letter (as often) with matters of particular detail (chs. 8-9) that have nothing to do with the conflict at hand.

Commentary

*Paulus, an envoy of Anointed Jesus on account of God's wishes
and Timotheos the brother
To God's assembly which is in Korinth with all the holy ones that are in the whole of Achaia.*

This is a fairly normal introduction, in the form of "FROM....TO...."

1:2 *Hello to you, and peace from God our Father and Lord Anointed Jesus.*

Worthy of praise is God; that is, the Father of our Lord Anointed Jesus, the father of compassion and god of all comforting advice, the one who comforts us in all our affliction to the point where we are able to comfort those who are in all kinds of affliction on account of the comfort with which we ourselves have been comforted by God. Because just as the Anointed One's sufferings are abundant for us, in the same way, on account of the Anointed One, our comfort is abundant also.

Now whether we are afflicted, it is on behalf of that comfort and salvation of yours, or whether we are comforted, it is on behalf of your comfort which is working in your enduring the same sufferings as we are also suffering. And our hope on your behalf is firm. We know that as you are partners in the suffering, in the same way also you are partners in the comfort.

After a common greeting, Paulus praises God. In this instance, his greeting has wished for peace and his words of praise indicate the existence of trouble and Paulus' desire for comfort.

8 *For, brothers, we don't want you to be ignorant over the matter of that affliction of ours that is happening in Asia, because we were pressed to excess beyond our power, so that we were even in despair about our lives. But we ourselves had in ourselves the death sentence, so that we would not be persuaded by ourselves but by that God who raises the dead. He has rescued us and does rescue us from such a great number of deaths. We have also hoped in him to still rescue us. You too have been working together on our behalf by your prayers, so that in many faces thanks might be given on your behalf for our gift that was given to us by many.*

At this point in history, the Christians were facing mounting social persecution from their own kinsmen. Paulus expresses a fear for his own life, and the persecution was beginning to escalate to a point where a few of his opponents were resorting to violence and threats.

Again following a common literary device, Paulus connects himself with his readers. Not only do he and his companions hope in God, but also they are grateful for the Corinthians' prayers. The readers, too, are a part of his struggle.

12 *For our boasting (the testimony of our consciences) is this: that we conducted ourselves in creation with God's holiness and sincerity and not with fleshly wisdom but by God's generosity. Now we did so more abundantly toward you. For we are writing no other things to you than what you are now reading; now I hope you will recognize it until the end, just as also you recognized us partially. Because we are your boasting, just as you will be ours in the day of Lord Jesus.*

And being persuaded of this, I planned to come to you earlier, so that you would experience a second favor. And I planned to come through your region into Makedonia, and again to come to you from Makedonia, and to be sent onward from you into Judea. So since I planned this, surely I didn't make light use of the matter! Or am I wanting what I want according to the flesh, so that the "yes" and the "no" would be with me together? But, as God is trustworthy, our message to you is not "yes and no." For God's son, Anointed Jesus -- who was heralded among you by me

and Silvanus and Timotheos -- has not become "yes and no". On the contrary, he has become "yes" in him. For whatever God's promises are, they are "yes" in him and are "a-amen" to God on account of him, to his glory through us.

Preparing to disclose the central reason for writing the letter, Paulus begins his defense of himself. Rather than address so early in the letter those attacks made against him by others, he merely alludes to points in his favor. The readers were aware of certain attributes of Paulus and his friends: holiness and sincerity. He referred also to "boasting," but this boasting was proper boasting; later, he will be compelled to boast in another fashion.

Paulus has made two visits to Korinth thus far -- his initial introduction to them and a return trip. His third visit was postponed, and for that he apologized. Restating his intent to visit, Paulus defends the truthfulness of his earlier plans.

*Now the one who is establishing us together with you into the Anointed One
and the one who anointed us
is God,
who also sealed us and gave the pledge of the breath in our hearts.*

This statement of praise concludes the introductory comments, and they too are significant. The readers were being asked to realize that God had "anointed" Paulus and his companions. That is, they needed to recognize that Paulus in particular was sent by God. Thus, Paulus and his friends had the "pledge of the breath" -- guidance from God himself, and accompanying signs. But the beginning of this utterance is not to be ignored, for in it Paulus tied himself again to his readers. The same God who granted miraculous signs and wonders to his envoys and prophets also establishes the Korinthians and Paulus together equally in him.

23 *Now I call on God as a witness to my soul -- that it is in sparing you that I have come no longer into Korinth. This is not because we are lords over you in the faith; on the contrary, we are your coworkers in joy. For you have been standing in trust. For I myself judged this: not to come to you again in sorrow. For if I cause you sorrow, then who would make me glad, but the very one who was made sorrowful by me?*

Building on his earlier apology for not having visited the Korinthians, Paulus indicated that his reasons for not visiting included "sparing" them. Rather than go there angry, telling them all what to do, it had been his hope that they would work out some things on their own -- so that Paulus and his friends would not be seen as trying to be their superiors. Instead, they recognized that all Christians are of equal rank. Therefore, there had been no need to go to them "in sorrow," and his visit would have caused sorrow. Why?

10:1 *Now I am the same Paulus who is indeed humble among you when in your presence but who is bold toward you while absent -- I advise you on account of the meekness and gentleness of the Anointed One. Now I ask that while I am present I might not be bold with the persuasion with which I consider myself to be courageous toward those certain people who consider us as though we are walking according to the flesh. For although we are walking physically, we are not engaging in combat according to the physical nature.*

For the weapons of our combatants are not physical, but are powerful enough to God for the casting down of fortresses! They cast down speculations and every high thing that raises itself up against the knowledge of God, bringing every mind captive into the listening to the Anointed One, and it has the preparation to punish every negligence whenever your time of listening should be fulfilled.

You are seeing things according to appearance. If anyone has persuaded himself that he is the Anointed One's, he should consider this again for himself: that in the same way he is the Anointed One's, so also are we. For I would not be ashamed if I should boast somewhat more abundantly about our authority that God gave us (for edifying and not for tearing you down), so that I would not seem as though I would frighten you through the letters. Because indeed one says, "The letters are weighty and strong, but the bodily presence is weak, and the message was despised." Such a person should consider this: that such as we are when we are absent, in word through letters, such people are also in work while present.

Continuing to emphasize the equality of all Christians, Paulus alluded to the comments made by some of his Korinthian opponents. He was about to be again "bold toward them while absent," and this appears to have been a charge made by the opposition. "Why is he so gentle when among us and less gentle when he writes?" Considering the contents of 1 Corinthians, this is not surprising. Again he mentions "boasting," and yet again this is good "boasting" -- for he did not boast merely that he had spiritual gifts but that God had allowed him to assist the Korinthians with spiritual matters. Thus, his boasting was not about himself but was focused on other people's needs.

His second visit to them had been a gentle one, and he had spared them a harsh, sorrowful visit. However, the readers needed to realize that Paulus' harshness in his letters was only equal to the harsh actions to those opponents of his who were stirring up trouble for him.

12 *For we do not dare to rank or compare ourselves with some of those who are recommending themselves. On the contrary, these who are measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves to themselves have no understanding. Now we will not boast about unmeasured things, but according to the measure of the ruler which was assigned to us (to reach as far as even you) by the god of measure. For we are not overstretching ourselves, as if it did not reach to you, for we also reached as far as you in the good message of the Anointed One. This was not for us to boast in unmeasured things, in others' labors, but we had a hope that when your trust increased, we would be greatened among you according to our ruler to the point of abundance, to the point of announcing the good message into the parts beyond you -- not to boast about things that have been made ready with another's ruler. Now, "the one who boasts should boast in Yahweh." For it is not the one who recommends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord recommends.*

His application of his statements about equality were now made apparent. His opponents were boasting alright, but they were boasting about their own greatness. Paulus and his companions had boasted only about the great things that God was doing -- even though some of those great things were being done through Paulus. These political foes were engaged in regular human comparison: "I'm greater than that guy."

On the other hand, Paulus' companions considered such comparison to be unmeasured. That is, there was no objective standard for comparison, and so they were just going on bragging without any proper limits. Did it make sense for him to compare his deeds to theirs? No, and he did not want to. Did he need to compare his "pedigree" to theirs? No, for what he was hoping for was that they would trust God more, and **that** was something to boast about. They could brag all they wanted, but God's operation was proof enough that Paulus and his friends belonged to God. There was no need to brag, except in what God was doing for the Korinthians.

The citation is from the oracles of Jeremiah (9:23-24), where we read: "'The wise one should not boast in his wisdom, nor should the strong one boast in his strength, and the wealthy one should not boast of his wealth. But the one who boasts should boast in this: that he understands and knows me -- that I am Yahweh, I who practice steadfast love, justice, and justification on the land; for I delight in these things,' says Yahweh." Paulus has been following the advice given by God in Jeremiah, and he has also reprised his comments in his earlier letter (1 Cor 1:31). The problem with people "recommending themselves" in Korinth had not stopped, and so Paulus' earlier advice obviously needed to be repeated.

Recall from that letter that the Korinthians were following human schools of thought in factions. Apparently here, the factions still existed -- at least one of whom did not consider Paulus to be a "real" envoy like Peter was.

11:1 *I wish you would bear with me for a short time in something dumb. (But also you are bearing with me). For I am jealous for you with God's jealousy. For I engaged you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to the Anointed One. But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eva with his craftiness, your minds would be corrupted away from that simplicity and that purity which is for the Anointed One.*

About to demonstrate again the equality of all Christians, Paulus was preparing to show his own equality to any of the other heralds and envoys whom God had sent. This could have been viewed as bordering on the same kind of activity in which his opponents were engaging, and so he introduced his comparison as "something dumb."

The simplicity and purity that had been taught by Jesus included the repeated urging that his followers would treat one another equally (see, for example Mt 23:1-12). Such a mindset is necessary, and so Paulus considered the following comparison and defense to be necessary, so that his readers would not be deceived by something empty that sounded good -- much like Eva in the garden (Gen 3).

4 *For if indeed someone comes and heralds another Jesus which we did not herald, or if you receive a different breath which you did not receive with us or a different good message which you did not embrace with us, bear with this well.*

For I consider myself to be not at all behind those most superb envoys. But even if I am an idiot in speech; on the contrary, I am not an idiot in knowledge. [But in all things we have appeared in all ways to you.] Or did I do a sin, humbling myself so that you would be exalted? Because I announced as a gift to you God's good message. I robbed other assemblies, taking expenses for

your service. And while I was present with you and in need, I did not burden anyone by being lazy. For the brothers who came from Makedonia had previously filled my need. And in everything, I have kept myself -- and will keep myself -- from being a burden to you.

It is the Anointed One's truth in me that this boasting about me in the regions of Achaia will not be stopped. Why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do! But what I am doing, also I will do, so that I would cut off the opportunity for boasting from those who want an opportunity, so that they would be found in what they are boasting, just as we are also.

Another Jesus refers to messianic teachings that are different from what Paulus had explained to them. Specifically, Paulus intended to indicate the simple, pure message as previously alluded to in this letter. Paulus had been a "herald" to the Korinthians -- an official representative of Jesus and his spiritual Torah. But "another Jesus" also extends to the core understanding of what the Anointed One was all about. Was he a military leader (as some understood him)? No. Did he inaugurate an earthly priesthood, lineage, or leadership structure? No. Did he teach that his followers ought to overthrow Roman rule? No.

Having mentioned himself as a herald, Paulus then turned to the signs of a genuine envoy...the holy breath. The readers knew that the holy breath that they had seen in Paulus and had experienced themselves was genuine; therefore, should they receive a **different breath** because of their closeness to Paulus' opposition, they needed to realize that this other breath was not genuinely from God.

Finally, the core message itself -- the spiritual Torah -- cannot be altered by anyone who truly is from God. Therefore, if (since) their message was different, Paulus' foes are not from God. They taught a **different good message**, whereas the true good message does not emphasize following persons, or human authority structures.

As in his first letter to Korinth, here too we see that Paulus refers to himself in connection with the other envoys. Specifically, since the Twelve had been selected by Jesus from among those around him while he was alive, some controversy had surrounded Paulus. This was somewhat natural, since he had persecuted the followers of Jesus for several years prior to his conversion (Acts 9). Once again, he was compelled to defend his status, although clearly it displeased him to do so.

Did the "Kefa" (Peter) party among the Korinthians consider Paulus to be an idiot -- a person lacking genuine skill? It would seem so. So, if they considered his verbal skills to be lacking polish, at least they needed to recognize his knowledge. Alluding not to Peter but to his opponents, he indicated that he had always taught them freely -- without asking for anything. This differs so much from the "paid preachers" against which Paulus occasionally took a stand. Even beyond this: rather than taking their money or belongings, Paulus had asked others to help the poor in Korinth. Here, he refers to this as having "robbed" others in order to help them. Clearly he was not after their money. Returning again to his opposition, Paulus mentioned that he had not been "a burden" or "lazy"; that is, he had done physical labor among them rather than ask for financial support. Apparently then, his political foes wanted to be paid by the group at Korinth for their "service" of speaking to them.

The fact that he had never taken anything from them, but that he had worked hard while he was with them, was Paulus' usual method of operations. Everyone in the region knew that he behaved this way, and in reality so did his readers. Thus, this reminder set up an example of behavior that the Corinthians knew needed to be followed. Such honesty itself was worth talking about.

13 *For such false envoys are deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the Anointed One's envoys. And this is no wonder, for the Enemy himself is transformed into a messenger of Light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his servants also are transformed as servants of right. Their end will be according to their deeds.*

Now Paulus attacked his political rivals directly. Having established that his own spiritual gifts, witnessed by the Corinthians were genuine -- and by comparison, that his rivals had a counterfeit breath -- and having indicated the purity of his message, he labeled his foes as "false envoys." He had been sent by Jesus; they had not. Since they had been requesting money or goods for themselves, they were deceitful workers; he was not. Essentially, they were criminals pretending to have been sent by Jesus.

Finally, he compared them to the Enemy ("Satan"). Even the Enemy is able to deceive others into thinking that he is good, so that it should not surprise the readers that "his servants" -- Paulus' opponents -- were behaving similarly.

16 *Again I say: No one should think me to be unwise. But if you think otherwise, receive me also as an unwise person, so that I may also boast a little. What I am saying, I am not saying according to the Lord, but as with a lack of wisdom. Since many people are boasting according to the flesh, I will boast too.*

For you willingly bear with the unwise, since you are unwise. For you bear with it if someone enslaves you, if someone devours you, if someone takes from you, if someone elevates himself, if someone punches you in the face. I am speaking according to dishonor, because we were weak in that. But in whatever anyone is courageous, I am also courageous. (I'm speaking in a lack of wisdom.)

Some of the readers were in the process of being persuaded by the opposition party that Paulus was unskilled or even unwise. Paulus' reply was not to defend that charge. If they wanted to think he was a fool, he could not prevent them from doing so. However, if they thought him unwise, he would boast a bit like his (truly unwise) opponents were doing. He realized, though, that such ridiculous boasting lacked wisdom; his opponents relied on such boasting.

What made Paulus think that they were unwise? They were willing to pay someone to preach, and in doing so, they were allowing someone to be their superior. In this, the boasters had "enslaved" them and were "devouring" them. In elevating themselves as superiors, it was as though they were punching the Corinthians in the face.

22 *They are Hebrews? I am too. They are Israelites? I am too. They are Abraham's seed? I am too. They are the Anointed One's servants? Being completely unwise, I say, "I am more so:" more abundant in labors, beyond measure in scars, more abundantly in jails, often in death*

situations. Five times I received from Jews forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. One time I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day in the deep sea.

I am often on the road, in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from kinsmen, in danger from gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the desert, in danger at sea, in danger among false brothers. For labor and toil often in watching, in hunger and thirst, often in fastings, in cold and nakedness.

Aside from those exceptional things that are crowding me every day, I have concern for each of the assemblies. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who stumbles, and I am not aflame? If it is necessary to boast, I will boast in weaknesses. The God and Father of Anointed Jesus our Lord, the one who is praiseworthy into all the ages, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus, the Ethnarch of Aratus the King guarded the city of the Damaskines just to seize me, and I was lowered in a rope basket through a door in the wall, and I escaped their hands.

On to the "bragging" about which Paulus has expressed such reservations. This gives us the best indication as to what Paulus' rivals believed were appropriate criteria for leadership -- the things that made them "superior" to Paulus. The author distinguishes "Hebrews" from "Israelites." This is likely because the term "Hebrew" was being used to signify Jewish natives of Palestine. The Twelve were all Hebrews, as were Paulus' foes; so was Paulus himself. They had been boasting about their lineage. Being a native Jew, Paulus too was a descendant of Abraham -- through the tribe of Ben-Yamin.

However it was that these people had claimed to be servants of Jesus' work -- and thus deserving of financial support -- Paulus was "more so." With that, he detailed a long but not exhaustive list of the misfortunes and evils that he had suffered simply for being an envoy of the Messiah. Presumably, none of the Korinthian braggarts could honestly make such a claim.

Even in the midst of this unnecessary boasting, Paulus found it important to relate to his readers. His concern amidst all the ill-treatment was not for himself but for the groups of Christians whom he visited. Therefore, even when he was escaping from Damascus, it was only his close relationship with the Christians that enabled him to do so. It is these relationships that are important, and not his perceived status. For again, Paulus was emphasizing that all Christians are equal.

12:1 *Is it necessary to boast? Indeed, it makes no sense. But I will come to the point of visions and revelations of Yahweh. I know a person, in the Anointed One, who was snatched fourteen years ago up to the third heaven -- whether he was in a body I don't know; or if without the body, I don't know...God knows. And I know that this person was snatched into Paradise -- whether in a body or if without the body, I don't know...God knows. And he heard indescribable declarations, which it is impossible for a human being to speak. I will boast on behalf of such a person, but on behalf of myself I will not boast, unless it is in the weaknesses.*

For if I should want to boast, I will not be unwise, for I will tell the truth. But I am sparing you, lest someone should record about me more than he sees me to be or hears from me. And due to

the surpassing nature of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me so that I would not be highly exalted. It is an adversary's messenger, so that I would not be highly exalted.

I begged the Lord three times about this, so that it might be removed from me. And he said to me, "My generosity is enough for you. For power is made complete in weakness." Therefore, I will rather more gladly boast in my weaknesses, so that the Anointed One's power would dwell with me.

Most commentators believe that Paulus here writes of himself, but that he was too modest to openly brag about his closeness to God. He had been so privileged as to have been carried up into God's abode, and still it had not made him feel personally superior. The "three heavens" in this thought were: the atmosphere; space; and where God is (outside of the universe). Paulus found it possible to "boast" in the third person, as though the privileged person had not been himself, but he was unable to boast directly, for he knew himself to be undeserving of such boasting.

What did he boast about? He referred to it here as his "thorn in the flesh." Many others have speculated as to what this "thorn" may have been. Some say that it was a physical ailment or frailty. God's reply, however, tends to lead us to the conclusion that Paulus struggled with a recurring sin -- a problem of the "flesh" (physical or sinful nature). As much as he wanted to be rid of it, God told him that it was enough that he be forgiven. This weakness left Paulus feeling vulnerable and small -- never allowing him the opportunity to feel superior. Since he knew that all people are equals, he regarded it as a good thing that he could never feel superior...in the fashion, for example, that his rivals felt superior.

So I am well-pleased with weaknesses, with insults and times of distress, with persecutions and times of hardship on behalf of the Anointed One. For when I am weak, then I am powerful.

I have become an unwise person; you have made it necessary for me. For I am bound to be recommended by you, for in nothing was I inferior to the most superb envoys, even though I am nobody. Indeed, the signs of an envoy were worked out among you with all endurance: signs and wonders and powers. For in what way is it that you were inferior to the remaining assemblies, except that I myself did not burden you? Freely forgive me of this injustice!

In concluding, the writer referenced back to those things that his opponents alleged were weaknesses. Instead of claiming superiority, he embraced his identity. He was who he was, and whatever weaknesses he may have had, these did not bother him. Why not? Because he knew God was with him, that his work for the Messiah was important, and that indeed he was superior to no one.

After this, he apologized for having put his readers through such a round of foolish bragging. He saw himself not as superior to anyone but merely as not being INferior. God had provided the "signs of an envoy" which proved his identity, and that was enough. As for his conduct, certainly he never treated the Corinthians like they were inferior. He had refused even to burden them by asking them to support him, even though as a genuine envoy he could have done so. The last remark is sarcastic.

14 *Look, this third time I have readiness to come to you, and I will not be a burden. For I am not seeking your things, but you. For the children are not bound to treasure up for the parents, but the parents for the children. Now I will gladly spend myself (and will be completely spent) on behalf of your souls. If I should love you more abundantly, will I be loved less?*

Now whether it is or not, I did not burden you. But did I take from you by deceit by being crafty? Have I defrauded you through someone whom I sent? I advised Titus, and I sent the brother with him. Did I defraud you with Titus? Didn't we walk in the same spirit? Didn't we walk in the same steps?

Focusing on the future, Paulus looked ahead to his next visit to Korinth. Again he promised not to ask them to provide for him, refusing still to "be a burden" to them. Being one of their teachers, he thought of himself as a parent to them. The saying that he cites reflects the duty of parents to save for their children's future, and he applied it to spiritual "parents" as well. That is, instead of taking money from them, a true spiritual parent ought to give what he has to his children. In short, it was necessary for him to do something opposite to what his rivals were doing.

Did he mean that he needed to provide for their finances? No. But instead, he gave them what he had -- the benefit of whatever God had taught him -- and he gave it freely. Thus, he said that he would give himself up completely on behalf of their souls (or "lives"). In fact, everyone whom he had sent them and each of his associates had behaved the same way.

19 *Do you think that we are defending ourselves again? We are speaking in the Anointed, next to God. Now beloved, all things are on your behalf, for building up. For I am afraid, lest perhaps when I come I would not find you to be as I want, and I would not be found by you to be as you want: lest perhaps there is strife, jealousy, rage, bigotries, mean talkings, gossipings, puffing up, chaos; otherwise, when I come again, my God should humble me before you, and I should lament over many of those who sinned previously and who did not change their minds away from the uncleanness and prostitution and debauchery which they practiced.*

After providing a thorough defense of his own behavior and retort to his political enemies in Korinth, Paulus indicated that his hope was not for himself but for his readers. The factious behavior that his rivals were stirring up was causing strife, jealousy, and all sorts of bad things. Paulus was concerned that when he did return to see the Korinthians that he would have to lament about their condition.

13:1 *I am coming to you this third time. By the mouth of two or three witnesses every declaration will be established. I said previously, and I am telling you beforehand as when I was present the second time (though now I am absent), to those who sinned previously and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare you, since you are seeking proof of the Anointed One who is speaking in me. He is not weak toward you but is powerful among you.*

For also he was crucified out of weakness, but he lives in God's power. For also, we are weak in him, but we live in him for you out of God's power.

Assuring them that indeed he was planning to see them again, Paulus prepared for a subject change. Although the topic at hand will continue to be the behavior of himself and his companions, his focus shifts here to the spiritual strength of the Korinthian Christians -- his readers. At this point, he promised to chastise them strongly if the situation among them were as bad as he feared it might be. Instead of the "weak presence" that his opponents asserted he had, Paulus wanted to rest assured that they'd see a full range of emotions from him if they did not correct themselves.

5 *Test yourselves, to see whether you are in trust. Examine yourselves. Or don't you yourselves recognize that Anointed Jesus is in you -- except you are without proof! Now I hope that you will know that we are not without proof.*

Now we wish to God that you do nothing bad, not so that we would appear proven, but so that you would do the nice thing -- though we may be like unproven ones. For we have no power against the truth, but on behalf of the truth. For we rejoice when we are weak but you are powerful. This also we wish: your restoration. For this reason, I am writing these things while absent, so that when I am present I would not use severity according to the authority which the Lord gave me (for building up, and not for tearing down).

Although compelled to defend himself, Paulus seriously wanted to keep the Korinthians as the focus of the argument; therefore, he continued to note that whatever he and his friends had been doing ... it was for them. Just as Paulus hoped that they would be restored to a proper state of mind, he asked them to honestly judge whether or not they truly trusted in God. Although they lacked certain miraculous proof that they were truly following the right teachings, they ought to have at least known that Paulus was teaching them the truth. Consequently, Paulus wrote that his intent in being so harsh was to build them up. Sometimes, the truth is hard to swallow, and this was Paulus' example of what we call today "tough love."

2:3 *And I wrote this same thing so that when I came I would not get sorrow from the ones by whom it is necessary for me to rejoice. I am persuaded that my joy is the joy of all of you. For I wrote to you out of much affliction and distress of the heart, through many tears -- not so that you might be sorrowful but that you would know the love that I have abundantly for you. Now if anyone has caused sorrow, he has not caused me sorrow except partially, so that I would not be a burden to all of you.*

That reproof which came by the majority is enough for such a person. And so, in opposition rather, you should forgive and advise him, lest such a person be swallowed up in abundant sorrow. So, I advise you to confirm God's love for him. For I wrote also for this reason: that I would know that you are in subjection in all things; which is your proof. Now I also forgive the one whom you have forgiven something. For also, whatever I have forgiven -- if I have forgiven something -- it is on account of you in the Anointed One's presence, so that we would not be overwhelmed by the Enemy. For we are not ignorant of his schemes.

Rather than experience an argument and confrontation in person, Paulus hoped that the matter might be somewhat resolved by the time he arrived in Korinth for their next face-to-face encounter. As for one particular (penitent?) rival, Paulus dismissed any pain he might have

caused. Instead, it was important to him to re-emphasize the equality of all believers. What was important? That he not burden them by living off of them.

"The reproof which came" is one indicator that people use to support the theory that this part of the letter is actually an entirely different (later) one. These commentators believe that it implies that the matters about which Paulus wrote in the "harsh" letter had already seen fruition in Korinth. After that letter, the readers rebuked the people who had been causing trouble for them and for Paulus. Thus, this letter commended them for having done so. However, the "harsh" parts of 2 Korinthians certainly seem to address a problem that was being caused by several persons, whereas everything here is in the singular. This part may just as well refer to someone who had been among the faction which opposed Paulus but who more recently wanted to be taken back by the readers into relationship with them. Paulus urged them to forgive people who wanted to be forgiven, just as he himself expressed forgiveness toward that man. That the problem was still going on, extending beyond the one man, is evidenced by the verses below.

Other commentators make this offensive (and forgiven) man out to be the incestuous man from the first letter to the Korinthians. However, this passage continues (vv. 12f.) with a reminder of the things written elsewhere in this letter -- about people who "sell God's message for money." It is not likely, then, that the incestuous man was being mentioned here.

12 Now when I came into Troas for the Anointed One's good message and when a door was opened to me in the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit when I could not find my brother Titus. But when I departed from them, I came into Makedonia.

Now thanks be to God, the one who always triumphs over us in the Anointed One, and who makes apparent through us in every place the scent of the knowledge of him. Because we are a fragrance of the Anointed One for God among those who are being saved, and among those who are being destroyed. To them indeed we are a scent from death to death, but to the former, we are a scent from life to life.

Paulus next emphasizes the role of God in "his" work. He was traveling because of the message that he had been given, and God was the one who "opened a door" for him. Consequently, he praises God for being so much greater than human beings and for having empowered the envoys. He doesn't describe the envoys as being a powerful force of any kind but rather "a fragrance." They merely present an odor or taste of what Jesus himself presented; these humans are not important enough to be thought of in stronger terms, and yet Paulus was able to convey their mission in such a simple metaphor. To those who reject the teaching of Love and Trust, their odor is the "scent of death," but to those who embrace it, their odor is a scent of life.

And who is enough for these things? For we are not like the rest, who sell God's message for money. On the contrary, as out of sincerity, we are speaking in the Anointed One as from God and next to God.

The answer to the rhetorical question is "no one." No one is strong enough on their own. No one deserved even what the envoys had -- to be a mere "fragrance" of the message. Acknowledging this, the true envoys (among them Paulus) realized that they did not deserve money. No, they

merely spoke sincerely about the Messiah, who had been sent by God. Still again, Paulus conveys here in another way how inappropriate it is for someone to be paid for telling God's message.

3:1 *Are we beginning to recommend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You are our letter, written in our hearts, being made known to and being read by all people. It is being made apparent that you are the Anointed One's letter, being served by us and written not with ink but with the breath of the living God, not on stone tablets but on fleshly tablets of the heart.*

More rhetorical questions. Again, the answers should have been obvious to the readers. Since God was the one who was really working through them, and since they were a fragrance of the Messiah, what good would letters of recommendation have done them? What good would it have done to have people talking about what great speakers or leaders they were? Their work spoke for itself, and rather than focus on the miraculous signs he focused on the fact that others had turned to Trust and Love on their account. This was testimony enough that they were true envoys of the Messiah.

4 *Now we are persuaded of this toward God on account of Anointed Jesus: not that we are enough by ourselves to consider anything, as though our adequacy were from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God. He also made us adequate to be servants of a new covenant, not of writing but of spirit. For writing kills but the spirit makes alive.*

How did they know for sure that they were genuine envoys? They had not only someone's say-so but also the holy breath (spirit) from God. This made sense, for the new covenant is a covenant of spirit; that is, it is a covenant of internal principles and not of rituals and regulations.

7 *Now if the service of death, in writings engraved on stones, happened in glory -- so that the sons of Israel were not even able to gaze upon Moses' face on account of the glory of his face, which is fading away -- how long rather should the service of the spirit be in glory? For if the service of condemnation was glory, how much rather more abundant is the glory of the service of right? For also, that which was glorified has no glory in this respect: on account of the surpassing glory. For if what is fading away does so with glory, what remains does so rather in more glory.*

As in other letters (notably the one to the Romans), Paulus refers to the Mosaic covenant as though it were a covenant of death. What he means is that people understood that covenant and lived in it as though it were all about governing physical activity -- as though God were a police officer. Being conscious of their guilt, they "were not even able" to look at Moses' face (which had been brightened by God). However, it was obviously "glorious" (physically, literally) for Moses to serve God in bringing forth the Torah. Even more so it was glorious (figuratively) for Jesus to explain the spiritual principles behind the Torah.

"What is fading away" is the first covenant. As the age ended during the First Revolt, Priestly Judaism ceased to exist. No more sacrifices would be offered at the temple, leaving only the Messianic covenant to remain -- with even greater glory.

12 *Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are exercising a great amount of freedom of speech. And we are not like Moses who placed a veil on his face, so that the sons of Israel would not gaze upon the end of what was fading away. On the contrary, their minds were hardened, for to this day the same veil remains on those who read of the old covenant. It has not been revealed to them that it was taken away in the Anointed One. But to this day, when Moses is read, a veil is draped over their hearts. But when he would turn to Yahweh, the veil would be taken from around it.*

But the Lord is a spirit, and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. Now we see clearly the Lord's glory as an uncovered face, as we are being transformed into the same image from one glory into another glory, just as from the spirit of the Lord.

Paulus and the other envoys knew that the Mosaic covenant was going to end, and that the Messianic one would remain. Since they knew that, they were able to speak freely about such things. Again applying the situation with Moses, the author indicated that the envoys did not veil their faces; they did not try to conceal the (greater) glory of the new covenant. On the contrary, they revealed it.

However, just as many of the Israelites did not listen to Moses years ago (during the period covered in the Torah), so also there were many people in Paulus' time who heard the Torah and who still did not understand. However, if anyone would reject ritual religion, replacing it with the principles of Love and Trust, the metaphorical veil around his heart would be lifted.

4:1 *On account of this, since we have this service just as we received mercy, we do not do a poor job. On the contrary, we refused the secret things of disgrace: we do not walk in craftiness, nor do we deceitfully present God's message, but by the appearing of the truth we recommend ourselves to every human conscience in God's presence.*

Now if indeed our good message is covered up, it is covered up among those who are being destroyed. The god of this age has blinded the minds of those among them who do not trust, so that they would not see the shining brightness of the good message of the glory of the Anointed One, who is God's image.

For we are not heralding by ourselves, but with Jesus the Anointed Lord. But we ourselves are your slaves on account of Jesus. Because God, the one who spoke for light to shine out of darkness, is the one who shone in our hearts for the illumination of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Anointed Jesus.

Knowing that if people only listened their veils would be lifted, the envoys were vigorous advocates of the spiritual message. They refused money -- "the things of disgrace." Instead, they merely presented the truth to others, which they did for free and openly. Thus, they did not "cover up" the glorious message, although those who wanted to stay in ritual religion were trying to cover it up. This action Paulus attributes (perhaps metaphorically) to the Enemy, who was portrayed here as having blinded the people who would remain in ritual religion. These people, then, have been blinded in the same way that someone who tried to gaze at Moses' face might

have been blinded. Here, though, it is the good message that shines brightly, and once again it only blinds those who reject it.

7 Now we have this treasure in vessels of pottery, so that the overabundance of the power may be viewed as God's and not from ourselves. In all things we are afflicted, but we are not beaten down; we are confused, but we are not in despair; we are persecuted, but we are not being forsaken; we are being cast down, but we are not being destroyed. We always carry around in our bodies the dying of Jesus, so that also Jesus' life might appear in our bodies. For if we who are alive are delivered up to death on account of Jesus, it is so that Jesus' life might also be made to appear in our mortal flesh. And so, the death is working in us, but it is life in you.

"This treasure" is the good message of Love and Trust, and the vessels of pottery were the envoys. Who would keep a great treasure in simple earthen jars? No one. Ah, but the jars are not valuable like the treasure is! No one can claim, then, that they came up with such a glorious message; it is from God. Since they knew this, the envoys were never defeated, even though they suffered constant attack from their religious opponents. It remained their goal not merely to teach the teaching but to live it, so that the real teaching emerged from their lifestyles. In Paulus' words, Jesus was carried around in their bodies. His teachings were apparent even to the Korinthian readers. Their bodies were going to die, but the teachings that they revealed represented life to everyone who understood and learned from them.

13 Now we have the same spirit of trust, according to what was written, "I trusted, so I spoke." And we trust, and so we are speaking ... knowing that the one who raised up Jesus will also raise us up through Jesus and will present us together with you. For all these things are on your account, so that the generosity which has been plentiful on account of many might make your thanksgiving superabundant, to God's glory.

Psa 116:10 reads in the Septuagint, "I trusted, so I spoke." It continues to talk about being "greatly afflicted," just as the envoys were being afflicted by their religious rivals. The next verse remarks that human beings are not trustworthy. The psalm of thanksgiving is a pledge from God's servant to "call on Yahweh's name," live "the message of salvation," and remain a loving servant. Similarly, the envoys trusted, and they spoke. They spoke to people like the readers, so that God would make them equally thankful to him.

16 So we do not do a poor job. On the contrary, even if our outer person is worn out, our inner one is still being renewed day by day. For the momentary light weight of affliction is working out for us according to an exceedingly excessive eternal weight of glory. We are not looking at the things that are seen but at the things that are not seen. For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are not seen are eternal.

The readers might have begun to think that it was impossible to remain an envoy under such conditions. Paulus anticipated that thought, contradicting it. All of the things that they suffered as a result of being envoys were merely a "momentary light weight" -- a slight and temporary burden. By comparison, the glory of the message being worked through them was permanent and far heavier. If they saw the persecution and strife, those things were merely temporary. The message and its significance were indeed permanent.

5:1 *For we know that if our earthly house, our tent, should be brought down, we have a dwelling from God: an eternal house in the heavens which was not made with hands. For we are groaning in this also, wanting strongly to be clothed with that dwelling of ours that is from heaven. If indeed we have been clothed, then we will not be found naked. For indeed those who are in the tent are groaning since we are oppressed. We don't want to be unclothed from it, but to be clothed, so that the mortal thing would be swallowed up by the life.*

Now the one who has worked us out for this same reason is God, the one who gave us the pledge of the breath. Therefore, since we are always confident, and since we know that while we are at home in the body we are not at home, away from the Lord (for we are walking through trust and not through sight), now we are confident and well-pleased to rather be away from home out of the body, and to be at home directed toward the Lord.

The "tent" here is the physical body. There are those who are "in the tent" -- living in this life -- who are concerned about how the envoys are being socially (and sometimes physically) persecuted. However, Paulus redirects their focus away from the matters of physical existence. Physical life is not so important; after all, a non-physical life remains for them in the heavens. In case the readers might think they have death wishes, he added that the envoys don't wish death for themselves. Rather, they view this mortal life as having been "swallowed up" by the far greater spiritual life.

This was all God's plan, and that God is the same god who gave the envoys the power to work miracles. The miracles attested to the genuine nature of the apostolic mission. The envoys, then, were able to be confident in their work. The reference to "walking through trust and not through sight" is to be taken together with what he has just written about the ritual religion as compared to the life of Love and Trust. Rather than live by religious rituals and systems, the envoys lived by Trust.

Thus, the envoys were "away from" their celestial home, but they remained on earth, constantly focused on God.

6 *So also, we are striving ambitiously to be well-pleasing to him, whether we are at home or whether we are away from home. For it is necessary for all of us to appear before the Anointed One's tribunal, so that each one would receive the things belonging to his own body, relating to what was practiced, whether it was good or bad. Therefore, since we know the fear of the Lord, we are persuading people. Now we have been made to appear to God, and I hope we have appeared also in your consciences.*

We are not recommending ourselves again to you. On the contrary, we are giving you an opportunity of boasting on our behalf, so that you would have something for those who are boasting in a face and not in a heart.

For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God. If we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the Anointed One's love is holding us, since we have judged this: that if one died on behalf of all, then all died, and he died on behalf of all so that the ones who are living would live no longer for themselves but for the one who died on their behalf and who was raised up.

The envoys worked hard, recognizing that theirs was a special calling -- a calling with responsibilities. Paulus described this apostolic responsibility as though it were an appearance before the tribunal of a governor. It was something that they did not take lightly. Not wishing to disappoint Jesus, they did exactly what he had commissioned them to do -- they tried to persuade people to follow his teachings.

16 *And so, from this moment we don't know anyone according to the flesh, even if we knew the Anointed One according to the flesh. But now we know this way no longer. And so if someone is in the Anointed One, he is a new creation. The earlier things have passed away. Look, they have become new! Now all the things are from God, the one who reconciled himself to us through the Anointed One and who gave us the service of reconciliation. We have this because God was reconciling creation to himself in the Anointed One, not recording their wanderings against them. And he has placed in us the good message of the reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors on behalf of the Anointed One, as if God were advising through us. On behalf of the Anointed One we are begging: "Be reconciled to God."*

Always focusing on the more important spiritual principles, the envoys strove to regard no one "according to the flesh." Such was the way of thinking among the leaders of Priestly Judaism, who tended to regard physical circumcision as having a great place. They looked at meetings in the temple and synagogues as having real significance, and they believed that earthly lineage was important. Instead of that mindset, Paulus and the other envoys tried hard to look upon people not as "Jews" or "gentiles" but as individuals. Thus, whatever religious heritage they might have had, the envoys saw none of it: "the earlier things have passed away."

Theirs was a "service of reconciliation," calling people to return not only to God but to his guiding principles. As official representatives of that reconciliation, the envoys were "ambassadors." They asked simply that others "be reconciled to God." Was this something that the readers could argue with?

21 *For he made the one who knew no sin to be a sin-offering on our behalf, so that we might become God's ethics in him. Now since we are also working together with him, we are advising you not to receive God's generosity in vain. For he says, "In an acceptable season I heard you, and in a day of salvation I helped you." Look, now is the well-accepted season; now is the day of salvation! We give no one a cause of stumbling in anything, so that the service would not be stained, but in all things we set ourselves down as God's servants, with much endurance, with times of affliction, with times of distress, with times of hardship, with whippings, with jails, with times of chaos, with labors, with times of watching, with times of fasting, with purity, with knowledge, with longsuffering, with gentleness, with holy breath, with love without hypocrisy, with a message of truth, with God's power, through those right and left arms of what is right, through glory and dishonor, through bad reputations and good reputations:*

*as deceivers, and yet true;
as ignorant, and yet recognizing;
as dying, and look, we are alive;
as being trained and not being put to death;
as sorrowful but always rejoicing;*

*as poor people, but making many wealthy;
as having nothing and possessing all things.*

As in Paulus' earlier usage, "we" refers to the envoys. The envoys were supposed to reveal God's ethical system of justification. Jesus had personally sent them out with the message and with gifts from God; thus, they were working together with God. Knowing that they were working with God, their advice to the Korinthians was like advice from God. What was that advice? Not to "receive God's generosity in vain." That is, they needed to be mindful of the fact that Priestly Judaism was about to cease to exist, and they needed to live in that knowledge. Regardless of how persuasive Paulus' rivals were, the readers knew that ritual religion would do them no good. Instead of being tempted back into it, they needed to live according to God's principles.

The citation (Isa 49:8) comes from a context similar to what the envoys themselves lived in. The Israelites were in Exile, with their temple in ruin, and something similar was about to happen again. The prophet had been sent out with a mission of consolation for Israel, and the envoys had been sent with a similar mission. In application, the Korinthians needed to realize that the envoys ("God's servants") had gone through numerous trials on their behalf.

Even if people were labeling Paulus as a deceiver, or ignorant, or dying, ..., or having nothing, the readers needed to realize that he and the other envoys were in fact truthful, and perceptive, and alive, ..., and that they had everything important to life.

6:11 *Our mouths are opened to you. Korinthians, our hearts have been enlarged. You are not being beaten down by us, but you are being beaten down by your own deep feelings. Now as a repayment for this very thing, also be enlarged. (I am speaking as to children.)*

The would-be paid preachers who were Paulus' rivals had been verbally insulting Paulus, but the readers needed to realize that they themselves knew what was right. It wasn't Paulus' harsh rebuke that was causing them suffering; on the contrary, they knew all along what was right. Their own deep feelings were convicting them -- pointing them in the right direction. Therefore, Paulus merely asked them to listen to their consciences.

14 *Do not become yoked in different directions with those who do not trust. For what partnership do right and lawlessness have? Or what sharing does light have with darkness? Now what harmony does the Anointed One have with Beliar? Or what part does one who trusts have with one who does not trust? Now what agreement does God's temple have with idols? For you are God's living temple, just as God said that,
"I will dwell among them and I will walk among them.
And I will be their God, and they will be my people."*

So, "come out from their midst" and separate yourselves, says Yahweh. And "touch no unclean thing," and I will receive you in. And, "I will be a Father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to me," says Yahweh Almighty.

"Becoming yoked" has been interpreted every way from "dating" to "being friends." Literally, being yoked refers to oxen, who are bound together. Oxen that travel together can pull a heavier

load than the two oxen could pull separately. However, if the two oxen pull in different directions, then the result is that the cart goes nowhere.

Therefore, Paulus wrote that his readers should not accept the people who were promoting ritual religion. Their teachings were like "lawlessness" (a rejection of the principles of the Torah) and "darkness." Beliar (or Belial) is the personification of everything worthless. In Dt 13, the children of Beliar favored idolatry over the teachings of Yahweh. Paulus' implication is that the people's ritual religion became idolatry, whereas Jesus' explanation of the Torah was good and pure. God's true temple is within (as he says, "you are God's living temple"), but a reliance on physical temples was idolatry. Harsh words!

The quotations this time are from Lev 26:12 (combined with Ezek 37:27), Isa 52:11, and 2 Sam 7:14.

In Leviticus, God begins the promise (quoted here) with the words "If you walk in my statutes and keep my precepts... (v.3)." Paulus' application is that they are promised relationship with God only if they follow Jesus' teachings of Love and Trust. Ezek 37 addresses the New Covenant (vv. 24ff.), using similar wording.

Isaiah 52:1-12 urges the Jewish people to purge themselves of anything that was part of the culture of impurity and idolatry. These were necessary for the people to be accepted. Paulus concludes with a reference to the New Covenant in David's time -- that it would be characterized by a familial relationship with God.

7:1 Therefore, since we have these promises, beloved, we should cleanse ourselves from all physical and spiritual pollution as we make holiness complete in the fear of God.

The author's application for his readers was that they should have nothing to do with the people who were trying to lead them back into ritual religion -- the same people who wanted money in return for telling them about God.

2 Take us in. We have been unjust to no one. We have corrupted no one. We have defrauded no one. I am not speaking for condemnation, for I said before that "It is in our hearts to die together and to live together." My freedom of speech toward you is great. My boasting on your behalf is great. I have been filled with comfort. I am overabundant with joy in all our affliction. For also, when we came into Makedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted in all things. There were outward fights and inward fears. But the one who comforts the humble ones, God, comforted us with the presence of Titus. But not only with his presence, but also with the comfort with which Titus was comforted regarding you. He announced to us your longing, your lamentation, your jealousy on my behalf. And so, rather, I rejoiced, because even if I caused you sorrow with the letter, I do not regret it. If I did regret it also, seeing that the letter made you sorrowful for but an hour, I now rejoice -- not because you were made sorrowful, but because you were made sorrowful to the point of mental change. For you were sorrowful according to God, so that you might forfeit nothing from us. For the sorrow which is according to God works out mental change to the point of a salvation which is not to be regretted.

On the other hand, Paulus and the other envoys had not tried to take money from anyone. They had wronged no one. Therefore, the readers ought to listen to these genuine envoys rather than the would-be paid preachers. Paulus always rejoiced and suffered along with his beloved readers, and it was his hope that they would forget nothing that he and his example had taught them. If they were sad, at least that emotion would bring them to the point of rejecting ritual religion (and its supporters) altogether.

For, look at how much diligence this same thing -- your being sorrowful according to God -- has produced in you! What a defense! What indignation! What fear! What longing! What jealousy! What vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be pure in practice. If after all I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who was wronged, nor on account of the one who did wrong, but on account of that diligence of yours on our behalf, that it might appear to you in God's presence. On account of this, we were comforted.

The readers apparently felt that their feelings were unproductive or even wrong. Paulus countered that by pointing out to them different positive aspects of what they may have been feeling. Since good things were happening, Paulus felt comforted on their behalf.

In our comfort, we rejoiced rather more abundantly in Titus' joy, because if I have boasted anything to him on your behalf, I am not ashamed. On the contrary, as we said all things to you in truth, in the same way also our boasting to Titus became truth. And his deep feelings are abundant for you as he remembers how you all were listening as you received him with fear and trembling. I rejoice that I have confidence in you in all things.

When Titus brought the news about them, Paulus and his friends were pleased that the Corinthians were making progress. "He remembers" is an instructional tool, reminding the readers about a time when the readers were sure of the commitment that they had made to God. Paulus finishes his thoughts on the subject, then, with words of joy on their behalf.

8:1 *Now, brothers, we are making known to you that free gift of God which has been given among the assemblies in Makedonia. Because in a time of much proving and affliction, the abundance of their joy and the depth of their poverty was abundant to the point of being the wealth of their simplicity. Because I am testifying that voluntarily and with much begging they were asking us for the favor of sharing in the service for the holy ones -- according to their power and beyond their power. And it was not just as we were hoping, but they gave themselves first to the Lord, then to us on account of what God wanted, to the point where we called Titus aside, so that just as he had begun earlier, similarly he would also complete this favor among you as well.*

But just as you are abundant in all things -- trust, and the message, and knowledge, and all diligence, and love from you to us -- may you also be abundant in this favor also. I am not saying this as an arrangement, but on account of the diligence of others I am also examining the reality of your love. For you know the generosity of our Lord Anointed Jesus: that, though he was wealthy, on your account he was impoverished, so that by his poverty you might become wealthy.

After having defended the mission of the envoys, and after demonstrating that Jesus' followers are all to be part of a tight-knit community, Paulus seemingly changes subjects. The famine relief (perhaps as a followup to the original relief effort) served two additional purposes. First of all, since the food was going to Jerusalem it helped to demonstrate to the Jewish Christians there that Christians in gentile-dominated areas (like Makedonia and Korinth) cared about their fellow Christians. The "Jew-gentile split" was not to be found among followers of the Anointed One. The additional purpose for the Korinthians was that it would have made them feel like they were indeed part of the greater body of Christian believers.

Notice that Paulus began by praising groups from another region. If the Korinthians continued to support the effort, they would be joining an effort that was being spearheaded by other gentile Messianics and would be directly assisting their Jewish brothers and sisters.

The generous Makedonians had very little to give, and yet they had wanted so much to give. How much more then would the Korinthians give, out of their considerable relative wealth? Notice that the author continues to stress his confidence in the readers, just as he had done in earlier parts of the letter. Jesus served as an example, for he gave everything for them, in order to increase their (spiritual) wealth. By Paulus' reckoning, it would be much easier for his readers to give physical goods than to give their lives.

10 And I give an opinion in this matter. For this makes sense for you, who previously (since last year) began not only to do it but also to want it. But now also make the doing complete, so that just as you want it with eagerness, so also you would have the completion. For if the eagerness is put first, it is well received according to what he might have, not according to what he doesn't have. For this is not so that others will be at rest and you will be in affliction; on the contrary, this is out of the concept of equality. In the present season, your abundance should be for what they lack, so that also their abundance would be for what you lack -- so that there would be equality, just as it was written, "The one who had gathered much did not have too much, and the one who had gathered little did not have too little."

Paulus' opinion is easy to follow. One year ago, they had wanted to assist the Jerusalemites. If only they followed through on their pledge, they would feel the warmth of their generosity. Even though Jewish people in Korinth had been troubling them, nothing of that sort should stand in the way of helping their fellow Christians.

The concept that Paulus laid before them was one of "equality." When Christians gave to those who had a need (Ac 2, Ac 4), this was called "the sharing." Since the sharing was to stem from love, and was a result of loving, it was important for the Korinthians not to shut off their love from their Palestinian counterparts.

Paulus cited Ex 16:18 as support for the Christian notion of equality. That passage refers to God's having granted manna for the Israelites to eat (as they traveled across the desert). God had given them food to eat, and no matter how much each had seemed to gather, it was the right amount for each to eat. The test for the Israelites was that in having just the right amount, they would be compelled to follow God's leading and instruction. They could not accumulate a

surplus, for it wound up being destroyed. The gift of food that they did not cultivate was a generous act, but it was also a test.

In the same way, the Corinthians who had plenty of food needed to realize that their wealth was a test for them. After all...how much food could *they* eat? They should have been happy to have enough.

16 *Now thanks be to God, the one who has been placing in Titus' heart the same diligence on your behalf. Because indeed he got the advice, but since he was extremely earnest, he was going out to you of his own accord. Now we sent with him the brother whose praise in the good message rings out through all of the assemblies. Now not only this, but also he was hand-picked by the assembly to be our fellow traveler with this free gift, the one that we are serving at the table in our eagerness for the Lord's glory.*

We are withdrawing from anyone who stains us in this abundance that is being served at the table by us. For we are directing our thoughts toward nice things, not only in God's presence, but also in the presence of human beings. Now with them we have sent our brother, whom we have proven to be diligent many times in many things. But now he is much more diligent because of the great persuasion he has for you. On Titus' behalf: he is my partner and is a fellow-worker for you. As for our brothers, they are envoys of the assemblies, to the Anointed One's glory. Therefore, point out to them in the presence of the assemblies the proof of your love and of our boasting on your behalf.

As was often the case, Paulus used the example of himself and his companions. With diligence, they had been collecting food to "serve at the table" in Jerusalem. This was also the example of all the envoys, "our brothers." Indicating that he had been boasting to the other envoys about the upcoming gift from Korinth, he asked his readers to follow through -- showing that their love was as great as Paulus had been claiming it was.

9:1 *For indeed, about the food service for the holy ones, it is too much for me to write to you. For I know your eagerness, about which I am boasting on your behalf to Makedonia, because Achaia has been prepared since last year, and that jealousy from you has stirred up many. But I sent the brothers so that our boasting on your behalf would not be worthless about this part, so that (as I said) you may be prepared, so that when the Makedonians come with me, they would not find you unprepared. We (I am not saying "you") would be disgraced in this conviction.*

Therefore, I regarded it as a necessity to advise the brothers, so that they would go on ahead to you and make ready the "praise" that you previously announced, that in this way it would be ready as a thing of praise and not as a thing of greed. But there is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows with praises will also reap with praises. Each one should give just as he chose in his heart earlier: not out of sorrow or out of necessity. For "God" loves "a cheerful giver." Now God is able to make every generous thing abundant for you, so that in all things, always, you may have all that is enough for you to be abundant in every good deed, just as it was written, "He has scattered. He gave to the poor. His just thing remains for the age."

The (earlier) jealousy and eagerness of the Korinthians toward the relief effort had been a catalyst for others, prompting them to give (or give more). That Paulus was bragging about their generous proposal was not meant to disgrace them, but he was honestly praising them for their pledge. Now, though, they needed to carry it through.

He cited several reasons why the Korinthians needed to carry out their pledge. First, generosity breeds generosity (just as the news of their intended generosity had inspired others). He also expressed the concern that if they reneged it would come back to haunt them. Secondly, their gifts needed to come from the heart; specifically, they needed to regain the cheerful and eager attitude that they had once held. The first reference appears to be from the Septuagint text of Prov 22:9, which indicates that God blesses those who help the poor.

His third point, relating possibly back to his reference to the manna, was that God would supply whatever the Korinthians' needed, so that their abundance would not be lost. Here he referred to Psa 112:9. In that passage, "he" is not God but the person who follows Yahweh and who delights in his principles (v.1). Giving to support the poor is a sign of love in someone's heart, and such an act of generosity would remain forever. On the other hand, the psalm contrasts this with the wicked man whose desires amount to nothing.

Now the one who supplies seed (and bread for food) to the sower will supply you and will multiply your sowing, and he will increase the products of your ethics. You are being made wealthy for every liberality, which is working out thanksgiving to God through us. Because the service at the table of this religious service is not only fulfilling what the holy ones lack, but it is also being made abundant, through the thanksgiving of many to God.

Therefore, Paulus promised them that God would take care of them, and was taking care of them, if only they continued to live by the principle of love. In this case, that involved carrying out their pledge to share with starving Jewish Christians.

On account of the proof of this service, they are glorifying God: at the submissiveness of your acknowledgement for the good message of the Anointed One and at the liberality of your sharing for them and for all. They are glorifying God also by their supplication on your behalf. They long for you on account of God's surpassing favor, which was bestowed upon you. Thanks to God for his inexpressible gift!

"Many" Christians were already praising God because of the Korinthians' generosity. They praised God because the Korinthians were following God's principles. This emotion was so strong that they prayed to God that the Korinthians would be blessed and hoped to one day meet them. God had granted them gifts to give, and simply, he hoped that they would continue to be thankful to God and to give out of love.

Paulus wrote all of those things without having to mention the bigotry that was cropping up. Attitudes like that needed to be put aside, and by not giving them a place in his letter, Paulus also put them aside. His readers needed to focus on love; they did not need to be reminded of bigotry at this point.

13:11 *Brothers this remains: Rejoice, be restored, be comforted, have the same attitude, be at peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you.*

As a parting statement, the readers only needed to remember that Paulus wanted them to return to God's guidance, follow God's teachings, love one another equally, and be at peace. Such things would find the blessing of God.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All of the holy ones greet you. The generosity of the Lord, Anointed Jesus, and God's love, and the sharing of the breath be with you all.

A traditional and brief closing ends this short letter. Even here, though, Paulus emphasized the community of all Christians. "All" of his fellow Christians greeted them, even as he wanted them to be affectionate toward one another. The things that he hoped would be with them included generosity (like that of Jesus), love, and sharing. Sharing the miraculous holy breath was also a tie that bound them together, and was unmistakably from God. Nothing more needed to be written.