

Paul's Emotions in 2 Corinthians: Part 1 (Chapters 1-7)

— Stephen Voorwinde —

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

Paul's second letter to the Corinthians has been aptly described as "simply a pouring out of the man himself."¹ It is certainly the most emotionally charged of Paul's epistles. More than one commentator has referred to it as "a tumult of conflicting emotions."² The letter therefore provides a unique window into the apostle's soul.

Specific references to Paul's emotions are found no less than thirty-five times, and twenty different Greek words are used.³ No less impressive is the range of emotions expressed. He despairs (1:8), experiences sorrow (2:1, 3; 6:10), is glad (2:2; 12:9, 15), rejoices (2:3; 6:10; 7:4, 7, 9, 13, 16; 13:9), feels anguish of heart (2:4), sheds tears (2:4), loves (2:4; 5:14; 6:6; 11:11; 12:15), is perplexed (4:8), groans (5:2, 4), has regrets (7:8), is afraid (7:5; 11:3; 12:20) and jealous (11:2), mourns (12:21) and burns with distress (11:29).⁴ Paul's major emotions in the epistle would therefore seem to be joy/gladness (12x), sorrow (9x) and love (6x). Less common are fear (3x), perplexity/despair (2x) and regret (1x).

Yet what is it that drives these emotions? What is it particularly that causes the apostle to feel so deeply in 2 Corinthians? What stirs and fires him? These

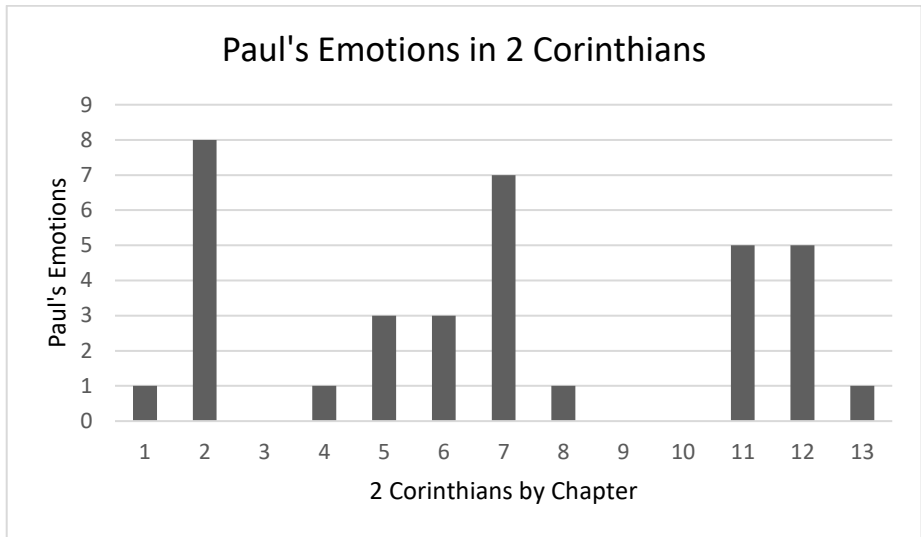
¹ Ralph P. Martin, *New Testament Foundations: A Guide for Christian Students* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 2:175.

² See R. H. Strachan, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, Moffatt New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1935), xxix.

³ For discussions of the criteria used to identify emotions in the NT, see Stephen Voorwinde, *Jesus' Emotions in the Fourth Gospel: Human or Divine?* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 21-28; *Jesus' Emotions in the Gospels* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 2-4.

⁴ The designation of Paul's emotions here is based on their rendering in the NASB. Unless otherwise indicated, all English Bible quotations in this article are from this translation.

are complex questions, but an early clue may be found in the fact that Paul's emotions are not evenly spread throughout the epistle, but tend to cluster at certain key points. A breakdown of their occurrence chapter by chapter reveals a certain ebb and flow:



Even a cursory glance at the distribution of Paul's emotions therefore shows a marked clustering in chapters two and seven. What makes this even more remarkable is the fact the passages where these fifteen references occur deal with the same subject, namely the severe letter that Paul wrote after his painful (and unsuccessful) visit to Corinth (2:1-4; 7:8-12). How this letter would be received by the Corinthians clearly filled the apostle with a high degree of angst. On the other hand, the news that it had been well received brought great relief and unbounded joy. Between the two references to the severe letter Paul discusses the nature of his new covenant ministry in slightly more muted language (2:12-7:1). He then goes on, with remarkable equanimity, to appeal to the Corinthians to complete their contribution to the Jerusalem offering (8:1-9:15). In a renewed defence of his ministry in chapters 10-13 there is a gradual build up of his emotions until they ebb away again at the end of the epistle. All in all there is therefore a certain "shape" to Paul's emotions in 2 Corinthians. This will become clearer as each occurrence is considered in its context.

Chapter 1

1:8 Despair

After a customary exordium (vv. 1-2) and thanksgiving (vv. 3-7) typical of Graeco-Roman letters, Paul begins the epistle proper by reminding the Corinthians of a near-death experience in the province of Roman Asia: *For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we **despaired** even of life* (v. 8). Paul here admits to an unusual and strongly negative emotion. But what was it that had driven him to despair, an emotion never again attributed to him either in his epistles or in the book of Acts? Several answers have been suggested in response to this important question.

B. B. Warfield identified Paul's near-death experience with his fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32), a conflict which he interprets quite literally. He argues that "the limitation 'at Ephesus' seems to exclude the figurative interpretation" and that "the course of thought appears to demand a literal interpretation of the words."⁵ Paul "had been called upon to undergo a martyrdom out of which only that God who raises the dead could bring him alive."⁶ Warfield sees significant parallels between 1 Cor 15 and 2 Cor 1: ". . . in 1 Corinthians, when speaking of the resurrection, Paul thinks of his casting to the beasts at Ephesus; and in 2 Corinthians, written to the same people and not long afterwards, when speaking of a supreme trial that he had to endure in Asia, he thinks of the God that raiseth from the dead."⁷

While it is possible that Paul did fight with wild animals at Ephesus, there are some serious objections against it. Not least is the fact that "the apostle could not have been sentenced 'ad bestias' without losing his Roman citizenship, which he still held at a later date, and which formed the basis for his appeal to the emperor."⁸ Even if the struggle with wild beasts is understood literally, Paul could have been speaking hypothetically, since the clause "if I had fought

⁵ Benjamin B. Warfield, "Some Difficult Passages in the First Chapter of 2 Corinthians," *Journal of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis* 6 (1886): 32. Historically this is the earliest explanation of this affliction that we possess. It was originally proposed by Tertullian in *De Resurrectione Carnis* 48.

⁶ Warfield, "Difficult Passages," 32.

⁷ Warfield, "Difficult Passages," 34.

⁸ BDAG, 455.

with wild animals” can be taken as a contrary to fact or unreal condition. Thus, while Warfield’s explanation remains possible, it is highly unlikely.⁹

C. H. Dodd explains Paul’s despair as having been due to a severe illness rather than to persecution. Parenthetically he adds that this was probably an attack of the same malady that Paul later identifies as “a thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor 12:7).¹⁰ Although diagnosis is impossible, Dodd argues that “before he recovered he came near to death.” It was a profoundly transforming experience from which Paul emerged “in a strangely chastened mood.” He had gone to the depths and “made terms with the last realities.” From these observations Dodd draws a large conclusion:

Whether or not I am right in isolating this particular spiritual crisis as a sort of second conversion, it is at any rate plain that in the later epistles there is a change of temper. The traces of fanaticism and intolerance disappear, almost if not quite completely, along with all that insistence on his own dignity.¹¹

While the transforming character of Paul’s near-death experience can hardly be denied, the force of Dodd’s argument depends heavily on his assumption that 2 Cor 10-13 can be identified with the severe letter that was written before chapters 1-9. This rearrangement of the order and chronology of these two major sections of the epistle must, however, remain highly speculative as it has no textual basis. In the history of the transmission of the text 2 Corinthians has always been a single epistle.

F. F. Bruce, while allowing for the possibility that Paul’s near-death experience was an illness that nearly proved fatal, argues that “it is rather more probable that it was due to human hostility, and that certain circumstances made it advisable not to enter into unnecessary detail about it in writing.”¹² This human hostility may well have come in the form of “some threat to his life on

⁹ Cf. F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 230: “That Paul was in danger of wild beasts, or was in danger of being so exposed is most unlikely . . . Roman citizens like Paul had certain indefectible rights. But whatever the words mean in their figurative sense (‘humanly speaking’), they do point to some great danger faced by Paul – conceivably, but not certainly, in connexion with the Demetrius riot.”

¹⁰ C. H. Dodd, *New Testament Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1953), 68.

¹¹ Dodd, *New Testament Studies*, 81.

¹² F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit*, rev. ed. (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1977), 295.

the part of powerful enemies from which he could see no way of escape – so that when, beyond all expectation, deliverance came, he greeted it as a miracle of resurrection.”¹³

Bruce further discusses the possibility that, with the removal of Silanus as the governor of Asia by Nero’s mother Agrippina, Paul’s opponents may well have thought they had a better chance of prosecuting him.¹⁴ He identifies this period of Paul’s Ephesian ministry with the time that Priscilla and Aquila “risked their own necks” for his life (Rom 16:4), and notes that later it was “the Jews from Asia” (Acts 21:27) who stirred up the Jerusalem crowd against Paul, “which almost led to his being lynched on the spot.”¹⁵ Interesting as this reconstruction of events may be, it does remain, as Bruce himself admits, “a matter of hypothesis.”¹⁶

Whatever the cause of Paul’s affliction in Asia, whether it was human, medical or animal,¹⁷ there can be no doubt about the severity of the experience: “. . . we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life” (1:8). The affliction through which Paul and his companions passed was in every sense extreme and so was their response to it.¹⁸ The verb translated “despaired” (ἐξαπορέομαι) is found only once in the LXX.¹⁹ Perhaps significantly, it occurs in Psalm 88, that darkest of dark Psalms, where the Psalmist complains that he “was brought low and into despair” (v. 15). As it turns out, there are some tantalizing parallels between Psalm 88 (87 LXX) and 2 Cor 1:8-11. Two major areas of similarity can be detected:

¹³ Bruce, *New Testament History*, 331.

¹⁴ Bruce, *Paul*, 294-98.

¹⁵ Bruce, *Paul*, 297.

¹⁶ Bruce, *Paul*, 298.

¹⁷ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 166-72, summarises the proposed identifications of Paul’s affliction as follows: (a) fighting with wild beasts at Ephesus, (b) Jewish opposition to Paul at Ephesus, (c) imprisonment in Asia, (d) grave dangers resulting from the Demetrius riot, and (e) a severe illness. He argues that the last of these alternatives is the most probable.

¹⁸ Cf. Philip E. Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 16: “The Corinthian Christians were ignorant not of the character, but of the *intensity* of Paul’s affliction. Hence Paul writes to tell them not *what* it was, but *how* it had oppressed him beyond endurance.”

¹⁹ The underlying Hebrew verb is also a *hapax legomenon* in the OT.

- (a) Both Paul and the Psalmist are in dire straits and their very lives are threatened. The Psalmist's life has drawn nigh to Hades and he has been reckoned with those who go down to the pit (Psa 87: 4-5 LXX). He was in fact laid "in the lowest pit, in dark places, and in the shadow of death" (Psa 87:7). Paul despaired even of life (2 Cor 1:8) and had within himself the sentence of death (2 Cor 1:9).
- (b) Both place their hope and trust in God. Paul places his trust not in himself but in God who raises the dead (2 Cor 1:9) and believes that God will yet deliver him (2 Cor 1:10). The Psalmist addresses God as "the God of my salvation" (Psa 87:2) and repeatedly refers to him as "Lord", the covenant name of God (Psa 87: 2, 10, 14, 15).

In spite of these suggestive similarities there are, however, also significant differences. Paul is delivered (2 Cor 1:10), the Psalmist is not (Psa 87:19). Paul has prayer support (2 Cor 1:11), while the Psalmist is separated from his friends and acquaintances (Psa 87:9, 19). Paul's prayers are answered and will be answered, while the Psalmist has no such assurance. Most importantly, Paul's emphasis on the resurrection (2 Cor 1:9) is lacking in the Psalm. Between the Psalmist and Paul stands the resurrection of Jesus. When it comes to his perspective on suffering, this central event in redemptive history provides a major focus in the apostle's thinking. He is now able to view his suffering through the theological grid of the death and resurrection of Jesus. This gives Paul a perspective and depth of insight that was unavailable to the Psalmist. However profound, comforting and instructive the lament of Psalm 88(87 LXX) may be, it is not the last word on human suffering. Although both have survived their ordeal, for Paul – in contrast to the Psalmist – it has been more than a near-death experience. As Michael Knowles has observed:

Jesus' experience of death and resurrection has been repeated in Paul's own experience as nearly as is possible prior to the final and irreversible encounter with actual physical death. Paul is overwhelmed to the point of being crushed; he despairs of life, yet finds himself alive. It is not only a "near-death" experience but a "near-resurrection" experience as well.²⁰

²⁰ Michael J. Knowles, "Paul's 'Affliction' in Second Corinthians: Reflection, Integration, and a Pastoral Theology of the Cross," *The Journal of Pastoral Theology* 15 (2005): 67.

From this observation Knowles compellingly argues that here we find the key “to Paul’s mature understanding of, in turn, the cross of Jesus, the life of Christian faith, and the ministry to which Paul himself is called.”²¹ Paul’s brush with death reinforces what may be the most important insight of his mature ministry. He realizes that his own experience is essentially similar to that of Jesus on the cross and in his resurrection. This insight further refines his understanding of Christian ministry. It is defined by the paradigm of death and resurrection. Just as Paul’s theology had been radically transformed by his experience on the Damascus Road, it has now been further refined and reinforced by the biographical experience recorded in 2 Cor 1:8-11. “Rooted in an equally strong sense of divine sovereignty and saving initiative,” says Knowles, “the historical accomplishment of God’s Messiah now provides the theological lens through which Paul interprets his own and all of human experience.”²² Although Paul had appreciated the implications of Jesus’ death and resurrection prior to his affliction in Asia, “he now understands this paradigm more deeply, directly, and experientially, as a result of the suffering he has undergone.”²³

Knowles has proposed a bold thesis, but certainly a defensible one. For the purposes of this paper, the thesis will be applied to Paul’s emotions in this epistle. If the opening sentence in the main body of the epistle (2 Cor 1:8-11) does indeed provide the key to Paul’s interpretation of his own experience, then this would apply to his emotions as well. They too must be understood in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The joys and sorrows of

²¹ Knowles, “Paul’s ‘Affliction’,” 64.

²² Knowles, “Paul’s ‘Affliction’,” 67.

²³ Knowles, “Paul’s ‘Affliction’,” 76. Dodd, *New Testament Studies*, 111, has taken matters much further, arguing that the extreme danger of death to which Paul refers in 2 Cor 1:8-9 had helped to alter his outlook on the imminence of the Parousia. From now on he no longer expected it to take place in his lifetime. This argument, however, must be seen in the light of Dodd’s larger theological agenda which is to understand Paul’s thinking as moving from an apocalyptic eschatology in his earlier epistles to a realized eschatology in his later ones. 2 Corinthians serves as a turning point in this development. More modest is the observation by Bruce (*Paul*, 310): “Whatever other changes this experience occasioned in his outlook, it modified his perspective on death and resurrection. For one thing, he henceforth treats the prospect of his dying before the parousia as more probable than otherwise. This change would no doubt have come about in any case with the passage of time, but it was precipitated by his affliction in Asia.” As a result of this experience there is no fundamental change in Paul’s eschatological outlook, but, according to Bruce, it does lead Paul to consider a topic he had not previously discussed in his extant epistles, namely the intermediate state (2 Cor 5:1-10).

Paul's ministry, its highs and lows, the delights and the disappointments, are more than just part of the ebb and flow of human life, but can be appreciated more fully in the light of the central events of redemptive history which Paul had not only proclaimed in his preaching but now also profoundly reflects in his own experience.

Furthermore, the despair to which Paul's near-death experience drove him sets the tone for the rest of the epistle. Having opened up about his own "dark night of the soul," Paul now more readily wears his heart on his sleeve. Never before has he engaged in personal self-disclosure to this extent. "Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide" (2 Cor 6:11). The despair of which Paul spoke is now a thing of the past. The only other occurrence of *εξασπρόεομαι* in the NT is in 2 Cor 4:8, where he describes himself as "perplexed, but *not* despairing." This does not mean, however, that Paul's despair has now become a mere memory, a past trauma from which he has recovered and moved on. As part and parcel of his death-resurrection experience in Asia, it has not only affected him deeply but also provides a lens through which the remaining emotions in this epistle may be profitably viewed.

Chapter 2

The thesis that the death and resurrection of Jesus is central to Paul's experience and emotions is further substantiated by the paradoxes that drive 2 Corinthians. Several major paradoxes provide the structure for the epistle as a whole:

- (a) Comfort through despair (1:3-11)
- (b) Joy through sorrow (1:12-2:13; 7:5-16)
- (c) Glory through shame (2:14-7:4)
- (d) Generosity through poverty (8:1-9:15)
- (e) Power through weakness (10:1-13:10)

The overarching and undergirding paradox that embraces all the other paradoxes, however, is life through death (1:8-10; 2:15-16; 3:6; 4:10-12; 5:14-15; 6:9; 7:3). The life and death paradox describes and defines Paul's apostolic ministry, and links it in the most intimate possible way with the

death and resurrection of Jesus.²⁴ Hence all the paradoxes in this epistle cohere in the central gospel paradox of Jesus' resurrection through crucifixion (2 Cor 13:4). Thus Paul's apostolic ministry is most closely aligned to Jesus' messianic ministry. The paradox of life through death, cross followed by resurrection, is the most fundamental expression of apostolic ministry. It is expressed concretely in Paul's experience of comfort in suffering, joy through sorrow, glory in shame, wealth in poverty, and strength in weakness.²⁵

The crucifixion/resurrection paradox had already proved foundational in the writing of 1 Corinthians. Standing as pylons supporting the entire argument of the epistle, the crucifixion (chapter 1) and the resurrection (chapter 15) provide the doctrinal basis for the pastoral admonitions found in the intervening chapters.

In the same way, in 2 Corinthians, the death and resurrection of Jesus provide the groundwork and rationale for Paul's apostolic ministry and experience. So although in this epistle we encounter the emotions of Paul within the immediate context of the major paradoxes that provide its structure, they must ultimately be understood within the broader gospel framework of the death and resurrection of Jesus. This remains true as Paul's focus shifts from the despair/comfort paradox to the sorrow/joy paradox. The latter comes to its clearest expression at the beginning of chapter 2:

*¹ But I determined this for my own sake, that I would not come to you in **sorrow** again.*

*² For I, if I cause you sorrow, who then makes me **glad** but the one whom I made sorrowful?*

*³ This is the very thing I wrote you, so that when I came, I would not have **sorrow** from those who ought to make me **rejoice**; having confidence in you all that my **joy** would be the joy of you all.*

*⁴ For out of much affliction and **anguish of heart** I wrote to you with many **tears**; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the **love** which I have especially for you.*

²⁴ Cf. Evelyn Ashley, "Paul's Paradigm for Ministry in 2 Corinthians: Christ's Death and Resurrection" (doctoral thesis presented to Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia, 2006), 324: "This was Paul's paradigm because it followed the pattern of Jesus' death and resurrection."

²⁵ See Kirsten Mackerras, "Life through Death and the Paradox of Ministry in 2 Corinthians" (unpublished honours thesis, Australian College of Theology, June 2013), 80.

As has been argued elsewhere in this journal, the setting for Paul's emotions in this passage is found in his painful visit to Corinth (not recorded in Acts) and the subsequent severe letter that is to be distinguished from both his canonical epistles to the Corinthians and that was written in the period between them.²⁶ On the best reading of the evidence it would appear that the reasons behind the painful visit and the severe letter were certain unresolved issues between Paul and the Corinthian church. The Corinthians had failed to heed Paul's admonition to discipline the man guilty of having sexual relations with his step-mother (1 Cor 5:1-13). Another possible outstanding issue between Paul and the Corinthians was the refusal of at least some of their members to disassociate themselves completely from pagan temple worship (1 Cor 8-10), a problem which Paul would appear to be addressing again in 2 Cor 6:14-7:1.²⁷ In an effort to resolve such matters Paul had visited Corinth from Ephesus, but the visit turned out to be a complete fiasco. It would seem that the immoral man had mounted a personal attack against Paul and that the church had failed to defend its founding apostle.²⁸ The result was a very distressing confrontation that was painful to both Paul and the church, and a repetition of which he was keen to avoid. Hence his change of travel plans (2 Cor 1:15-24). Instead of returning for another potentially painful visit Paul wrote a stinging letter. It appears to have been an ultimatum to the church to deal with the wrongdoer. In the power struggle between Paul and the immoral man the church members had been no more than uncommitted onlookers. The severe letter was designed to drive them to action to force out the offender.²⁹ Although it caused sorrow to both himself and the church, this letter had the desired effect. The church carried out Paul's instructions and the incestuous man repented (2 Cor 2:5-11).

This back-story is essential for an accurate understanding of Paul's intensely emotional language in 2 Cor 2:1-4, to which we can now turn.

²⁶ See Martin Williams, "When Pastor-Church Relationships Get Complicated: Paul and the Corinthian Church," sections 8 & 9.

²⁷ Cf. Craig L. Blomberg, *From Pentecost to Patmos – Acts to Revelation: An Introduction and Survey* (Leicester: Apollos, 2006), 220: "Given the specific mention of temples in verse 16, the kinds of problems involved in continuing to attend pagan religious services (recall 1 Cor. 8-10 and esp. 10:14-22) may be foremost in view."

²⁸ Thus Colin G. Kruse, "The Offender and the Offence in 2 Corinthians 2:5 and 7:12," *The Tyndale Paper* 31, No. 3 (September, 1986): 1-8.

²⁹ See Paul W. Barnett, *The Corinthian Question: Why Did the Church Oppose Paul?* (Leicester: Apollos, 2011), 150.

2:1 Sorrow

Firstly he says, “I determined this for my own sake, that I would not come to you in *sorrow* again” (v. 1). He is referring back to his claim that it was “to spare you I came no more to Corinth” (1:23). He did not want a repetition of the earlier, painful visit. Although some have argued that “in sorrow” refers only to the Corinthian response to Paul,³⁰ it is most likely that the phrase is intended to refer to the apostle’s own feelings about the situation as well.³¹ The unsuccessful visit had left him a sadder man. In the verses that follow, Paul returns again and again to the sorrow that both he and the Corinthians experienced (vv. 2, 3, 4, 5, 7). It had been, mutually, an unpleasant and difficult experience.

2:2 Gladness

This mutuality of feeling is brought out in the next verse: “For if I cause you sorrow, who then makes me *glad* but the one whom I made sorrowful?” (v. 2) Charles Hodge has paraphrased this question as a general proposition: “I cannot expect joy from one to whom I bring sorrow.” He then further explains that “such was the apostle’s love for the Corinthians that unless they were happy he could not be happy.”³² The word “who?” is therefore best interpreted in a general sense. Paul does not seem to have any particular individual in mind.³³ He is simply telling the Corinthians that his sorrow is their sorrow, just as his joy is their joy.³⁴ The situation has been summed up well by Linda Belleville: “The reason he gives for his decision is that visiting them at this time would cause them to be sad and then there would be no one to make him *glad* (v. 2). So intimately was Paul’s happiness bound up with theirs that he refrained from coming until it would be a time of gladness and nurture for both.”³⁵

³⁰ For example, Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 215.

³¹ Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, rev. ed. (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 537, argue that the phrase “admits of the connotation ‘bringing sorrow’ (to you) as well as (coming) ‘in sorrow’”.

³² Hodge, *2 Corinthians*, 31.

³³ R. V. G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Tyndale, 1958), 50.

³⁴ Hughes, *2 Corinthians*, 53.

³⁵ Linda L. Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 70-71.

2:3 Sorrow and Joy

In verse 3 Paul further assures the Corinthians that even in writing them his severe letter he was working with them for their joy (1:24): “And this is the very thing I wrote you, lest, when I came, I should have *sorrow* from those who ought to make me *rejoice*; having confidence in you all, that my *joy* would be the joy of you all.”

This verse in and of itself is profoundly paradoxical. The words “the very thing I wrote you” are probably best taken as a reference to the discipline of the immoral man of 1 Cor 5.³⁶ By taking the painful step of excommunicating him as Paul had instructed them, the Corinthians would not only avoid another sorrowful visit from the apostle, but would in fact bring him joy, which in turn would lead to their own joy as well. Hence even the severe letter, which had caused the readers so much sorrow, was ultimately designed to bring them joy. The paradox could hardly be more stunning – a severe letter and painful discipline that result in deep and mutual joy.

2:4 Anguish, Tears and Love

Paul is quick to assure his readers, however, that the actual writing of the severe letter had given him no joy. He had written “out of much affliction and anguish of heart” and “with many tears” (v. 4). Once again Hodge’s comments would appear to be apposite: “His letter flowed from a broken heart. *Affliction and anguish* refer to his inward feelings, not to his outward circumstances, for both are qualified by the word *heart*. It was out of an afflicted, an oppressed heart, that he wrote.”³⁷ In a similar vein Tasker comments that Paul “had not been able to bring himself to the task without much mental anguish and distress; and he was constantly in tears when he wrote it.”³⁸ Pertinent as these observations may be, a convincing case can be made for the view that “affliction” refers to the situation out of which Paul wrote, while only his “anguish” refers to his inner feelings. Barnett has linked Paul’s affliction (θλίψις) here to “our affliction which came to us in Asia”

³⁶ Hodge, *2 Corinthians*, 32, contends that τούτο αὐτό refers to “the very thing which I did write respecting the incestuous person. The expression seems to have special reference to that case, because that is evidently the case to which the following verses relate.”

³⁷ Hodge, *2 Corinthians*, 33.

³⁸ Tasker, *2 Corinthians*, 51; cf. Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 221.

(1:8),³⁹ where the same word is used, and which had been the reason for his near-death experience. Perhaps not surprisingly the word “affliction” is used more often by Paul in 2 Corinthians than in any other epistle. Throughout this letter it consistently refers to outward circumstances rather than to inward feelings (1:4, 8; 2:4; 4:17; 6:4; 7:4; 8:2, 13). Thus, on the analogy of Paul’s later contrast, “conflicts without, fears within” (7:5), it could be said that in the case of writing the severe letter it was a matter of “affliction (θλίψις) without, anguish (συνοχή) within.” The latter is a rare word occurring in the NT again only in Luke 21:25, where it refers to dismay among nations at the signs of the end.⁴⁰ The term therefore indicates “a state of distress that involves a high degree of anxiety.”⁴¹ As he composed the severe letter, Paul was constantly anxious, even to the point of tears,⁴² about the Corinthian response to its painful message.

The sorrow/joy paradox in this passage is resolved at least in part by Paul’s love for the Corinthians. He had written the severe letter “not that you should be made sorrowful, but that you should know the *love* which I have especially for you” (v. 4). Although at one level the purpose of the letter *was* to cause its readers sorrow (7:8-11), it was ultimately designed to be a demonstration of the apostle’s love. The extreme circumstances out of which he wrote, the state of his heart as he composed the letter, and even its unpleasant contents should have made that abundantly clear, he says.

Paul’s love for the Corinthians had already been emphasized in his first epistle. It was to them that he had written the majestic poem on love that is 1 Cor 13, and his love for them was the very note on which this letter had closed. “My love be with you all,” he had said (1 Cor 16:24). Towards the end of the present letter he again reassures them of his love in the strongest possible terms (2 Cor 11:11; 12:15). So strong is this emphasis that it has even been suggested that Corinth was Paul’s favourite church and that he loved them more than all the others. According to Charles Hodge, “His love for them was more abundant, or greater, than that which he had for any other

³⁹ Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 121.

⁴⁰ In the LXX the word is also used rarely, but never in an emotional sense. It has to do with external distresses (Judges 2:3; Job 30:3; 38:28) and the sieges of cities (Jer 52:5; Micah 5:1).

⁴¹ BDAG, 974.

⁴² For a more detailed discussion of Paul’s tears, see Stephen Voorwinde, “Paul’s Emotions in Acts,” *Reformed Theological Review* 73 (2014): 87-89.

church.”⁴³ Tasker has further observed, “By its position in the Greek the word *love* is given the strongest possible emphasis. All his converts were the objects of Paul’s affection; but, as the expression *more abundantly unto you* clearly shows, he had a very special love for the Corinthians.”⁴⁴ Yet while Paul’s love for the Corinthians was undeniable, it should not be exaggerated. It is qualified by the adverb *περισσοτέρως* which, as a comparative, can indeed be translated “more abundantly.” However, in Hellenistic Greek, in the absence of a superlative form, *περισσοτέρως* does duty for both the comparative and the superlative, and can be understood in the relative sense “especially”.⁴⁵ “Its force,” says Barnett, “is to reinforce rather than to compare. Paul is not saying that he loved the Corinthians more than others.”⁴⁶ Even so, “in a manner that calls to mind Jesus’ forgiveness of those who caused him pain at the time of the crucifixion (Luke 23:34), Paul responded with a deep expression of overflowing love for those who had failed him.”⁴⁷ As he wrote, his heart was brimming over with love for them, a love which reflected the cruciform love of Jesus.

At one level it could therefore be argued that Paul’s love for the Corinthians was big enough to embrace his gladness and joy on the one hand and his sorrow, anguish of heart and many tears on the other. In a psychological sense his deep love explains the presence of the other, contrasting emotions. At a deeper level, however, the sorrow/joy paradox of these verses taps into the larger life-through-death paradox that dominates the epistle as a whole. The “death” associated with the painful visit and the severe letter ultimately issues in the “resurrection” of repentance and restoration. Just as Jesus’ crucifixion is followed by his resurrection, Paul’s anguished and tearful sorrow is followed by gladness and joy. Once again, his apostolic ministry is a reflection of the messianic ministry of Jesus.

⁴³ Hodge, *2 Corinthians*, 34.

⁴⁴ Tasker, *2 Corinthians*, 51.

⁴⁵ Thus BDAG, 806.

⁴⁶ Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 122.

⁴⁷ Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 122.

Chapters 3-6

Paul now embarks on a sustained defence of his new covenant ministry (2:14-7:4) beginning with an arresting metaphor: “But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him” (2:14 NIV). The “triumphal procession” was a lavish parade held in Rome to celebrate great victories in significant military campaigns. They were ostentatious celebrations filled with valiant soldiers, the spoils of war, and the most theatrical pomp and circumstance that Rome could muster. The triumphal procession also demonstrated Rome’s prowess as the victor by leading in triumph the most important leaders and warriors of the enemy, now presented as conquered slaves. Those led in triumphal procession were in fact being led to their death. At the end of the parade the Romans publicly slaughtered as a sacrifice to their gods those prisoners who had been led in the procession.⁴⁸

What makes this image so confronting is Paul’s application of it to his own life and ministry. He portrays himself not as a victorious soldier (as some have thought⁴⁹), but as a conquered prisoner of war.⁵⁰ He is like one of those defeated enemies who would be put to death at the end of the processional

⁴⁸ For the contents of this and the following paragraph I am indebted to Martin Williams, “Getting a Grip on 2 Corinthians: Its Structure and Themes” (unpublished lecture, RTC Preaching Conference, 2014), 10-11.

⁴⁹ E.g. David J. Williams, *Paul’s Metaphors: Their Context and Character* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999), 258: “Commentators disagree about how the image is applied, but it appears that Christ is the triumphator, processing, as it were, across the world with the apostles in his train, not as captives (as some suggest) exposed to public shame but as participants in Christ’s victory, sharing in his triumph.” Thus also Hodge, *2 Corinthians*, 44 (following Calvin); Tasker, *2 Corinthians*, 56-57. According to Colin Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), 85-86, “God leads Paul and his co-workers as victorious soldiers in a triumphal procession.” Others understand the image as God (positively) “making a show” of them (MM, 293) or simply as “making them known” (*EDNT* 2:155).

⁵⁰ “The rhetorical pattern of the ep. appears to favor this interp.” (BDAG, 459); cf. Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 150: “God’s leading him *in Christ* as a suffering servant . . . legitimates his ministry. Christ’s humiliation in crucifixion is reproduced in the life of his servant.” Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 245, writes: “Paul sees himself not as the partner but as the prisoner of the *triumphator*, not as an exultant soldier but as a willing and privileged captive, a trophy of the general’s victory, a one-time enemy who has been conquered.”

as a sacrifice to the Roman gods. It is an image of intense public humiliation and deep shame. Yet, paradoxically, this spectacle of profound shame provides the platform for the demonstration of resplendent glory – both for God and for Paul himself (3:7-11, 18; 4:4, 6, 15, 17; 6:8). Once again 2 Corinthians is an epistle that trades in extreme paradoxes. Paul’s defence of his glorious new covenant ministry opens with an image of overwhelming shame.

4:8 Perplexed

While at first sight Paul’s imagery of himself as a humiliated POW may seem overdone, the metaphor fits well into the wider context of this epistle. This kind of language recalls his description of the affliction in Asia where “we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves” (1:8-9). Paul picks up the metaphor of the triumphal procession again in chapter 4 where we have the first reference to his emotions in his defence of his apostolic ministry. The earlier imagery vividly returns in vv. 8-12:

⁸ *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; **perplexed**, but not despairing;*

⁹ *persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;*

¹⁰ *always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.*

¹¹ *For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.*

¹² *So death works in us, but life in you.*

In this passage the glory through shame paradox fits neatly within the life through death paradox. Paul’s current experience of deep shame and even living death will ultimately result in glory and life (see also vv. 14-18).

Within these paradoxes Paul sets up four balanced antitheses. He is afflicted, perplexed, persecuted and struck down, but not crushed, despairing, forsaken or destroyed. In these antitheses each element is indicated by a present participle in the Greek, thereby indicating a constant and ongoing situation. Hence these experiences consistently characterize his new covenant ministry. Moreover, as Harris has pointed out: “The negated second

element does not indicate a mere mitigation of the hardship; rather, it points to an actual divine deliverance (cf. 1:8-9); not simply a change of outlook on Paul's part, but God's intervention. In each case, the second element is an intense or an extreme form of the first."⁵¹

Nowhere is this intensification clearer than in the antithesis where Paul refers to his emotions – “perplexed, but not despairing” (ἀπορούμενοι ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐξασπορούμενοι, where the prefix ἐξ- appears to be best understood as indicating intensification). There is a play on words here that is difficult to reproduce in English. Nevertheless some valiant attempts have been made: “at a loss, but not losers” (BDAG), “confused, but not confounded” (Hughes),⁵² or, most boldly of all, “we may be knocked down, but we are never knocked out!” (Phillips). While each of these attempts retains the word play of the original, it comes at the cost of accuracy of translation. In his second antithesis Paul is using highly emotive language. While in the other contrasts he is referring to such external pressures as affliction and persecution, here he is revealing something of his inward feelings. He is perplexed, disturbed, bewildered, but not despairing.

The verb ἀπορέω occurs six times in the NT, once in the active voice and five times in the middle voice (as here), but with no apparent distinction in meaning. It has a wide range of subjects. Herod Antipas was perplexed or bewildered over John the Baptist (Mark 6:20), the disciples as to who Jesus' betrayer might be (John 13:22), the women over the empty tomb (Luke 24:4), Festus as to what to make of Paul (Acts 25:20), while Paul himself was perplexed about the Galatians (Gal 4:20). Only here in 2 Cor 4:8 is the verb used in a general sense to indicate an ongoing or recurring experience. Paul's ministry was clearly not without personal emotional consequences for the apostle himself.⁵³

In describing himself as “perplexed, but not despairing” Paul does seem to contradict what he had said earlier about his traumatic experience in Asia where he admitted that “we despaired even of life” (1:8). Harris offers a plausible explanation:

⁵¹ Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 342.

⁵² Hughes, *2 Corinthians*, 138.

⁵³ In the LXX, where this verb occurs 14x, it has a wider range of meanings than in the NT, but even there the emotional dimension is still prominent (Gen 32:7; Isa 8:22; 51:20; Jer 8:18; Hos 13:8; Sir 18:7; 1 Macc 3:28).

We may account for this apparent contradiction by observing that Paul's Asian encounter with death, when he *did* despair, taught him that there was no need ever again to despair with regard to any circumstance, for "the God who raises the dead" (1:9) was well able to deliver his servant from even extreme peril, if he so chose. On this view, 4:8b states aphoristically the lesson Paul learned from the experience recorded in 1:8-10.⁵⁴

Hence in the four antitheses of 2 Cor 4:8-9 Paul shows how the basic paradoxes of the epistle are resolved. Death is transformed to life, and shame to glory, only by divine intervention. To Paul's way of thinking, and on the basis of recent experience, there is no other way.

5:2, 4 Groaning

The death/resurrection paradox comes to explicit expression at the beginning of chapter 5:

¹ For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

*² For indeed in this house **we groan**, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven;*

³ inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked.

*⁴ For indeed while we are in this tent, **we groan**, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.*

⁵ Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.

At the end of chapter 4 Paul had drawn a contrast between the visible things that are temporal and the invisible things that are eternal (4:18). In chapter 5 he develops this contrast further by making it more specific. On the one hand there is "the earthly tent which is our house" (v. 1), "this tent . . . which is mortal" (v. 4). On the other hand there is "a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (v. 1), which can also be described as "our dwelling from heaven" (v. 4). The contrast is between the believer's

⁵⁴ Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 343-44 (italics his).

earthly, physical body and the glorious spiritual body that awaits him at the resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 15:42-49). Caught between their present reality and their future hope all that believers can do is groan. They groan with longing (v. 2) and they groan being burdened (v. 4). Although Paul together with other believers groans with longing for his heavenly dwelling, the excessive burdens that had made him recently despair of his very life (1:8) are never far from his mind. The painfully paradoxical nature of the Christian life and apostolic ministry often result in groaning. But what precisely is the nature of such groaning?

In the LXX the verb στενάζω that Paul uses here is associated with weeping (Job 30:25), mourning (Job 31:38; Isa 19:8; 24:7), lament (Nahum 3:7), affliction (Lam 1:8, 21), and the prospect of bitter grief (Ezek 21:6, 7) and disaster (Ezek 26:15). Groaning in the LXX therefore “expresses deep distress of spirit”⁵⁵ and is an “expression for human lament and powerless suffering in situations that people cannot change on their own.”⁵⁶

In the New Testament στενάζω, usually translated “sigh” or “groan”, is sometimes still associated with grief (Heb 13:17). Most of its six occurrences, however, open up a completely new dimension. This is particularly evident in the Pauline references. Paul describes the eschatological groaning of those who eagerly await the redemption of their bodies (Rom 8:23), which he describes more metaphorically in the present passage as “being clothed with our heavenly dwelling” (vv. 2, 4). The sighing still has the element of grief and distress (as in the LXX) but this is radically tempered by the hope of the resurrection body. Although their distress is still painfully real, the sighing of believers “expresses their eager expectation and longing . . . for the final fulfilment of the promised salvation already given to them in faith.”⁵⁷ In their groaning believers are not alone but are joined by the whole creation (Rom 8:22) and even by the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26; cf. 2 Cor 5:5). In this symphony of sighs Paul expresses most poignantly the eschatological tension between the “already” and the “not yet.” Encrypted within the sighing and groaning are both the painful distress of the old order and the sure hope of the world to come. Caught in the tension between their present distress and their future hope, the believers’ most appropriate response is to groan. In sympathy the

⁵⁵ TDNT 7:600.

⁵⁶ EDNT 3:272.

⁵⁷ EDNT 3:273.

Holy Spirit groans with them and helps them in their weakness (Rom 8:26, 27).

A word also needs to be said about Paul's use of the first person plural ("we groan") in this context. When it comes to expressing his emotions in 2 Corinthians, Paul alternates between using the first person singular and the first person plural. In chapters 1-7 the only times he uses the first person singular are in connection with his deeply personal and highly emotional involvement in the writing and reception of the severe letter (2:1-4; 7:4-16). All other references are couched in the first person plural. In most of these cases Paul seems to be identifying himself with his fellow missionaries (1:8; 4:8; 5:14; 6:6, 10). At the very least he would be including Timothy whose name is found in the *superscriptio* to this epistle (1:1). In the present context, however, his use of the first person plural is to be understood more broadly.⁵⁸ The groaning of which he speaks is the experience not just of the missionaries but of the readers as well. This is an emotion that Paul shares not only with his inner circle but with all believers. It is an expression of the eschatological tension felt by all those who, because of the Spirit's work, already belong to the age to come but are still living under the old order, "this present evil age" (Gal 1:4).⁵⁹

5.14 Love

The next reference to an emotion of Paul's in this chapter again occurs in a death/resurrection context:

¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.

⁵⁸ C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 118, has observed, "It is a matter of considerable discussion exactly where in the Pauline Epistles the plural is intended literally and where it is idiomatically used for the singular." He further points out that "each passage must be tested on its own merits." In the case of Paul's emotions in 2 Corinthians it would seem best to understand the plurals literally, their precise reference being determined by the context.

⁵⁹ For a more detailed discussion of this tension see Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 12-41.

¹² *We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart.*

¹³ *For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you.*

¹⁴ *For the **love** of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;*

¹⁵ *and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.*

Although this is a difficult and densely worded paragraph, its overall meaning is fairly straightforward. Paul is defending himself against his detractors who seem to be accusing him of blatant self-interest. This appears to be what lies behind his assertion in v. 12, “We are not again commending ourselves to you.” In his defence Paul can claim that he is driven by the purest of motives. Unlike his opponents, he does not take pride in appearance, but in what is going on in his heart (v. 12). When he examines his heart he knows that his ministry is not driven by self-interest but by “the fear of the Lord” (v. 11) and “the love of Christ” (v. 14). Both of these motivators are anchored firmly in landmark events in redemptive history. “The fear of the Lord” does not mean that Paul is afraid or frightened of the Lord. It is not an emotion but an attitude of respect that grows out of his keen awareness that “we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ” (v. 10). The other driving force behind his ministry is the love of Christ who “died for all” (v. 14) and “rose again on their behalf” (v. 15). Paul is therefore simultaneously looking both backwards and forwards. At his point in redemptive history, standing as he does between the death and resurrection of Jesus on the one hand and his coming in judgment on the other, Paul’s ministry is defined by both events. The fact that one day he must appear before the judgment-seat of Christ inspires him with a healthy “fear of the Lord,” while the death and resurrection of Jesus epitomize “the love of Christ.” Both fuel Paul’s ministry.

This explanation is no doubt sound as far as it goes, and most commentators are content to leave it at this. They regard “the love *of Christ*” as a subjective genitive, i.e. as a reference to Christ’s love for Paul. Ample evidence for this understanding would appear to be found in the immediate context of vv. 14-15 with their strong emphasis on the death and resurrection of Jesus. It cannot be denied that this is the supreme demonstration of Christ’s love for

Paul, and indeed for every believer. Nevertheless, in this case the subjective genitive hardly tells the whole story. Paul’s ministry is driven not only by Christ’s love for him, but also by his love for Christ. This is underscored by the fact that there is a parallel between “the fear of the Lord” and “the love of Christ.” Paul both fears the Lord and loves Christ. Just as “the fear *of the Lord*” is an objective genitive (it is Paul who fears the Lord and not vice versa), the same must also be true of “the love *of Christ*.” From the context it is therefore clear that Paul is speaking both of Christ’s love for him and his love for Christ. A firm choice between a subjective and an objective genitive in this case is simply impossible. As Zerwick has pointed out, “. . . we cannot simply classify this genitive under either heading without neglecting part of its value.”⁶⁰ Christ loves Paul, and he loves Christ. As inspiration for his apostolic ministry this is bedrock.

A further question remains, however. What precisely is Paul saying about his love for Christ and Christ’s love for him? The traditional translation of ἡ γὰρ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ συνέχει ἡμᾶς, “The love of Christ constrains us,” hardly suggests this love is a driving force behind Paul’s ministry, but rather that it is a limiting factor of some kind. This would certainly seem to be suggested by the other NT uses of the verb συνέχω in the active voice. Apart from this single use by Paul the other examples are all found in the writings of Luke. Peter informs Jesus that “the multitudes are *crowding* and pressing upon you” (Luke 8:45). Jesus tells Jerusalem that its enemies “will surround you and *hem you in* on every side” (Luke 19:43). Likewise, “the men who *were holding* Jesus in custody were mocking him” (Luke 26:63). At the conclusion of Stephen’s speech the members of the Sanhedrin “cried out with a loud voice and *covered* their ears” (Acts 7:57). Although this verb is used with a range of

⁶⁰ Maximilian Zerwick, *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1963), 13. He further observes that neither an objective nor a subjective genitive “alone corresponds fully to the sense of the text; the objective genitive (Paul’s love for Christ) does not suffice for . . . the reason which he adds speaks of the love which Christ manifested for us in dying for all men; nor is the subjective genitive (Christ’s love for us) fully satisfactory by itself, because the love in question is a living force working in the spirit of the apostle.” A similar explanation is offered by Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 120. Unable to decide between the objective and the subjective, Wallace regards 2 Cor 5:14 as a possible illustration of what he calls the “plenary genitive.” He explains: “. . . it is possible that both ideas were intended by Paul. Thus, ‘the love that comes from Christ produces our love for Christ – and this [the whole package] constrains us.’ In this example, then, the subjective *produces* the objective.”

meanings by Luke, all of these instances suggest a restricting or curbing of some kind of activity rather than the enabling or motivation of such an activity. This would also seem to be the sense in which a number of English translations have taken the verb in 2 Cor 5:14: “The love of Christ leaves us no choice” (NEB), “We are ruled by Christ’s love for us” (TEV), “The love of Christ controls us” (ESV, LB, NASB, RSV). Other translations, however, emphasise the motivating power of the love of Christ: “Christ’s love compels us” (Holman, NIV, NKJV), “the love of Christ urges us on” (NRSV), “the very spring of our actions is the love of Christ” (Phillips). So while some translations suggest that the love of Christ releases Paul for ministry, others would seem to suggest that the love of Christ somehow restrains him in ministry. So what does he really mean?

The dilemma is further highlighted by BDAG’s entries under *συνέχω*. This lexicon seldom shows signs of despair but that does seem to be the case here. The dozen occurrences of this verb in the NT have an almost bewildering array of meanings. Most of these are accounted for quite adequately by categories 1-6 assigned by BDAG. But none of these categories cover 2 Cor 5:14 for which a further two categories are needed: “7. To provide impulse for some activity, *urge on, impel* . . . 8. To hold within bounds so as to manage or guide, *direct, control*.”⁶¹ Is Paul therefore saying that the love of Christ urges him on and impels him or that it directs and controls him?

The choice that confronts us between the meanings of the verb is similar to the choice that confronted us between the subjective and objective genitive. Neither alternative exhausts the meaning indicated by the context. Simple and memorable as Paul’s words in this verse may be, they are riddled with ambiguity. On the one hand he is saying that his love for Christ is what drives and motivates him in his apostolic ministry. It impels him and urges him on. On the other hand it is Christ’s love for him that directs and controls him. Christ’s self-sacrificing love keeps him from self-seeking. Hence two thoughts are carefully intertwined here. Paul’s love for Christ motivates him and Christ’s love for Paul constrains and restrains him.

In defending his ministry against the charge of self-interest Paul is therefore able to claim the purest of motives – the fear of the Lord and the love of Christ. This is a remarkable claim, particularly when contrasted to ministries

⁶¹ BDAG, 971.

that are marred by motives that are impure and tainted or at best mixed. Although Paul had always been driven by high ideals, the refining experiences depicted at the beginning of this epistle (1:8-11) no doubt played their part in keeping his motives the purest.

6:6, 10 Love, Sorrow and Joy

Paul's emphasis in 5:14-15 on the love of Christ as supremely expressed in his death and resurrection, a love that in turn inspires Paul's love as one for whom Christ died and was raised, is pivotal to all that follows in the remainder of chapter 5 and on into chapter 6. In the light of Christ's death and resurrection Paul views others in a new way (5:16), and everyone for whom Christ died and was raised is the new creation in microcosm, a harbinger of the great future that is yet to come (5:17). In the death and resurrection of Jesus God was reconciling the world to himself (5:19). Paul and his colleagues have now been given the ministry of reconciliation (5:18), and in this capacity they are ambassadors for Christ (5:20) and co-workers with God (6:1).

Having demonstrated his position as a new creature, a minister of reconciliation, an ambassador of Christ and a co-worker with God, Paul is now finally able to do what he was formerly reluctant to do, and that is to commend himself and his ministry (6:4). Earlier in this epistle Paul had been careful not to commend himself (3:1; 5:12), except in the unobtrusive sense of commending himself to every man's conscience (4:2). At this point in his argument, however, as he begins to draw the discussion of his new covenant ministry to a close, he is able to commend himself far more fully and openly. Yet he does so in a highly paradoxical way. Once again all the paradoxes of his ministry are driven by the central death/resurrection paradox. He is indeed a co-worker with God and an ambassador for Christ, roles of high honour and great privilege, but these roles are also exercised in profoundly paradoxical ways (6:3-10):

³ *(We give) no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited,*

⁴ *but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses,*

⁵ *in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger,*

⁶ *in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love,*

⁷ *in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left,*

⁸ *by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true;*

⁹ *as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death,*

¹⁰ ***as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.***

In this paragraph Paul describes the paradoxical nature of his apostolic ministry by way of a catalogue of hardships and triumphs that all come by way of “much endurance” (v. 4):

- (a) Three triplets of troubles describe the *outward circumstances* of his ministry: “in afflictions . . . in hunger” (vv. 4b-5);
- (b) The challenge of these troubles is met by eight *inward graces or qualities of character* arranged in two groups of four: “in purity . . . in the power of God” (vv. 6-7a);
- (c) The *spiritual equipment* through which Paul conducted his ministry is set up by a series of three antitheses: “by the weapons of righteousness . . . by evil report and good report” (vv. 7b-8b);
- (d) A further set of seven antitheses describes the *vicissitudes* of Paul’s ministry: “regarded as deceivers and yet true . . . as having nothing yet possessing all things” (vv. 8c-10).⁶²

The references to Paul’s emotions in this context fall into categories (b) and (d). His “genuine love” (v. 6) is one of the inward graces or qualities of character that enable him to face the hardships of ministry, while “sorrowful yet always rejoicing” (v. 10) describes one of the vicissitudes of his ministry.

⁶² These divisions follow the suggestions made by Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 322-23, and Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 466-67. They are also anchored firmly in the grammar of the Greek text. Categories (a) and (b) are indicated by ἐν + the dative, (c) by δὲ + the genitive, and (d) by ὡς followed by an adjective or participle.

In the two earlier references to Paul's love in this epistle the object of his affection was clearly stated. He had written the severe letter so that the Corinthians might know "the love which I have especially for you" (2:4), while his ministry as a whole is impelled by his love for Christ (5:14). So in the present case is the genuine love of which he speaks intended to be understood as his love for others or as his love for Christ? Literally his love is "unhypocritical" (ἀνυποκρίτως), a word that is used elsewhere in the NT not only to describe love (Rom 12:9), but also faith (1 Tim 1:5; 2 Tim 1:5), wisdom (James 3:17) and brotherly kindness (1 Pet 1:22).⁶³ This wider evidence would suggest that a firm decision is impossible. Qualities that are "unhypocritical" can be directed both to God and to other human beings. So in the present instance it is probably best to understand Paul's love in the widest possible sense. In the midst of all his trials he maintains a genuine love for others and a genuine love for Christ, possibly to be understood in contrast to the "false apostles" and "false brothers" mentioned later in the epistle (11:13, 16).⁶⁴

While the object of Paul's love is left unstated, the source of his love is left in no doubt. The immediate context makes this plain. The eight inward graces or qualities of character of which he speaks in vv. 6-7a are arranged in two tetrads.⁶⁵ In the Greek text the first tetrad is made up of four phrases of two words each ("in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness"), while the second tetrad is made up of four phrases of three words each ("in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the word of truth, in the power of God"). In this carefully constructed literary unit Paul's love is coupled with "the word of truth" and bracketed by "the Holy Spirit" and "the power of God." Both are significant. "The word of truth" is more than "truthful speech" (NIV). It is synonymous with the gospel (Eph 1:14; Col 1:5). Hence the implication would be that Paul preached the gospel out of genuine love (perhaps again in contrast to the false apostles). Moreover, in Paul's parlance "the power of God" can be synonymous with the Holy Spirit (e.g. Rom 1:3, 4).⁶⁶ If that is the case here, then not only Paul's gospel preaching but also his genuine love is empowered by the Holy Spirit. The love of Christ that was supremely

⁶³ In the LXX the word is found only in the book of Wisdom where it refers to God's "impartial justice" (5:18) and "authentic command" (18:16).

⁶⁴ Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 329, writes: "Unhypocritical love . . . may be included here to point up the falsehood of the newly arrived counter-missionaries, whom he calls *pseudo*-apostles and (probably also) *pseudo*-brothers."

⁶⁵ Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 328.

⁶⁶ Thus Richard B. Gaffin, *The Centrality of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 69.

demonstrated in his death and resurrection (5:14-15) is now, by the Holy Spirit, being reproduced in the ministry of his apostle in the midst of trials and hardships. Not only is the message one of genuine love, the messenger also brings it in genuine love.

Nowhere in the present context is the paradoxical nature of Paul's ministry expressed more clearly than in the seven antitheses which describe the vicissitudes of that ministry: "as deceivers and yet true;⁹ as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death,¹⁰ *as sorrowful yet always rejoicing*, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things" (vv. 8c-10). All seven antitheses express two concurrent and paradoxical realities of Paul's apostolic ministry, namely life in the midst of death.⁶⁷ Even Paul's emotions of sorrow and joy are to be understood within this wider framework. While Paul no doubt uses the sorrow/joy paradox to describe his ministry in general, it has already come to expression in the present epistle in a most pointed way. The interplay between joy and sorrow is most poignant in Paul's references to the severe letter. We have already observed this in our discussion of his emotions in chapter 2 (above). The same emotions will soon reappear as he returns to the severe letter in chapter 7. Once again the sorrow and joy of the apostle are reflective, respectively, of the death and resurrection of Jesus.⁶⁸

Chapter 7

At first sight it would appear that in chapters 6 and 7 Paul's argument has some abrupt changes in subject matter. There seem to be digressions, and digressions within digressions. So much is this the case that Ralph Martin has declared that "in 2 Corinthians the flow of Paul's writing is erratic."⁶⁹ However, he will seem far less erratic if we appreciate a basic feature of his style in the Corinthian letters. On several occasions his form of argumentation follows the A – B – A' pattern. As Gordon Fee explains, "In each case the first 'A' section puts the matter into a larger, more general theological perspective; the 'B' section is an explanatory digression of some kind, yet

⁶⁷ Thus Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 480.

⁶⁸ The integration of doctrine and experience in Paul's writings has been further demonstrated in the recent essay by Stephen C. Barton, "Eschatology and the Emotions in Early Christianity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130 (2011): 571-91.

⁶⁹ Martin, *New Testament Foundations* 2: 175.

crucial to the argument as a whole; and the second 'A' section is the very specific response to the matter at hand."⁷⁰

A good example is Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Cor 12 – 14:⁷¹

A – Chapter 12, where he gives general theological principles regarding the spiritual gifts.

B – Chapter 13, which is about the way of love (an apparent digression).

A' – Chapter 14, which is an application of the foregoing to the matter at hand, i.e. prophecy and tongues.

Other examples are the question of divisions in the church: A (1 Cor 1:10-17), B (1 Cor 1:18-2:16) and A' (1 Cor 3:1ff.); and of eating meat offered to idols: A (1 Cor 8), B (1 Cor 9) and A' (1 Cor 10). An appreciation of this stylistic feature provides the key to successful interpretation. Applied to 2 Corinthians it seems to neutralise Martin's observation, referred to above, that "the flow of Paul's writing is erratic and less well-ordered, especially in the first seven chapters."⁷² The following structure is plausible:

A – 1:12 – 2:13	Paul's journeys to Corinth
B – 2:14 – 7:4	Paul's defence of his apostolic ministry
A' – 7:5 – 16	Paul's journeys again

⁷⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 16.

⁷¹ This structure becomes very apparent when the last verse of chapter 12 and the first verse of chapter 14 are read together: "But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way . . . Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy" (12:31; 14:1 NIV). These verses interpret one another. One of the greatest gifts (if not the greatest gift) which the Corinthians can eagerly desire is prophecy. The most excellent way that Paul will show is the way of love. But not only are these verses mutually interpretive, they also follow an A-B-A' pattern. They begin and end with the eager desire for greater spiritual gifts, especially prophecy. In between lies the way of love, which is the most excellent way any gift can be exercised. This is of course also the main point of 1 Cor 13.

⁷² Martin, *New Testament Foundations* 2: 175-76.

Once the reader realises how 2 Cor 7:5 picks up the thread that was dropped in 2 Cor 2:13, the thought flows very naturally. On a smaller scale we find the same structure again in 2 Cor 6:11-7:4, where 2 Cor 6:11-13 = A, 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 = B, and 2 Cor 7:2-4 = A'. The B section would appear to explain the problem that exists between Paul and the Corinthians at this point. The Corinthians' partnership with unbelievers has put a strain on their relationship with the apostle. As suggested above, this could be a reference to the fact that some of the Corinthians were still frequenting idol temples (1 Cor 10).

7:4 Joy

If our analysis of Paul's style in this context is correct, then the paragraph that is 7:2-4 serves a dual purpose: (a) in the immediate context it forms the A' section in 6:11-7:4, and (b) in the wider context it forms the conclusion to Paul's defence of his apostolic ministry in 2:14-7:4. Given its strategic position this paragraph therefore plays a pivotal role in Paul's argument as a whole.⁷³

(a) Its importance can be seen first of all when it is read in conjunction with 6:11-13, the first A section in Paul's appeal to the Corinthians:

¹¹ *Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide.*

¹² *You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections.*

¹³ *Now in a like exchange-- I speak as to children-- open wide to us also . . .*

² *Make room for us in your hearts; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one.*

³ *I do not speak to condemn you; for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together.*

⁴ *Great is my confidence in you, great is my boasting on your behalf; I am filled with comfort. I am overflowing with **joy** in all our affliction.*

These verses continue the theme of reconciliation. Towards the end of chapter 5 Paul had begged the Corinthians on behalf of Christ to be reconciled

⁷³ Cf. Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 358-59.

to God (5:20). Ever since that grand appeal he has been pleading with them to also be reconciled with himself, who is after all an ambassador for Christ (5:20) and a co-worker with God (6:1). He is also their spiritual father whose love is not being reciprocated (6:11-13). In his entreating them to love him unreservedly in return, the basis for Paul's appeal is both positive and negative. Positively, by way of the catalogue of hardships and triumphs (6:4-10), he reminds them of the integrity of his apostolic ministry. As Kruse has pointed out, "The purpose of Paul's long commendation (vv. 3-10) is to show that no fault was to be found in his ministry, and thereby to clear the ground for an appeal to the Corinthians for a full reconciliation with their apostle. Having done this, Paul proceeds immediately to his appeal."⁷⁴ Not far into his appeal, however, Paul digresses (6:14-7:1). In this digression he strikes a negative note. A major obstacle in their relationship is the Corinthians' being unequally yoked with unbelievers, probably in the sense that they are still frequenting pagan temples (6:14-16). Their ongoing compromise with idolatry is placing a severe strain on their relationship with Paul. They are cramped in their affections towards him. To be fully reconciled to Paul they need to appreciate the integrity of his apostolic ministry and also make a complete break with idolatry.

In the paragraph under consideration (7:2-4) Paul is therefore bringing his appeal for reconciliation to a close. The A section of his appeal had closed with an imperative, "Open wide (your hearts) to us also" (6:13). Now the A' section begins with a similar imperative, "Make room for us in your hearts" (7:2). Everything that follows in this short paragraph lends support to this imperative. In the remainder of v. 2 Paul again reminds his readers of the integrity of his apostolic ministry ("we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one"). In v. 3 he reminds them once more of his genuine love for them ("for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together"). In the Graeco-Roman world this was the kind of language that was used to express undying friendship.⁷⁵ Paul's word order gives his language a distinctly Christian twist. On the analogy of the death and resurrection of Jesus he mentions dying together before living together. The death/resurrection paradox lies at the heart of his relationship with the Corinthians.

⁷⁴ Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 134-35.

⁷⁵ Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 519; Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 142.

(b) In v. 4 Paul breaks new ground. No longer reminding them of what he had already written in chapter 6, he suddenly begins to paint on a broader canvas. He now writes as though his reconciliation with the Corinthians is already complete: “Great is my confidence in you, great is my boasting on your behalf; I am filled with comfort. I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction.”

In this verse Paul’s mood changes quite abruptly. The pleading tone of his appeal in the preceding verses gives way to an unbounded optimism expressed in his confidence, boasting, comfort and overflowing joy. It would seem that the earlier pleas have already been heeded, an impression that at first sight appears unrealistic. How can the seeming negatives – the plea to reciprocate Paul’s open-hearted love, the prohibition against partnership with unbelievers, the need for the apostle to defend the integrity of his ministry – be transformed into such glowing positives? What accounts for this sudden and unexpected change? These are difficult questions and the answer will need to be sought at different levels.

At one level the answer can be found in the overall structure of the epistle. While vv. 2-3 are best understood as the A’ section of the smaller chiasm that is found in 6:11-7:4, the main role of v. 4 is to complete the B section (2:14-7:4) of the larger chiasm that is formed by 1:12-7:16. Thus the vocabulary of this verse reaches much further back into the epistle’s overall argument. This can be appreciated even at the purely lexical and conceptual level. Paul’s confidence in the Corinthians is an echo of the confidence of speech he can use in proclaiming his new covenant ministry (3:12). His comfort in the midst of affliction is a reminder of the near-death experience he described at the beginning of the epistle (1:3-8). His affliction and joy take him back to the writing of the severe letter (1:24; 2:3, 4; cf. 6:4, 10), a topic to which he will return in the remainder of the present chapter (7:5-16). As we will see in the consideration of those verses, it is particularly the Corinthians’ response to the severe letter that fills the apostle with such boundless joy.

Paul’s joyful response to the good news that Titus brings from Corinth provides a unique insight into the pastor’s heart of the apostle. Perhaps a contemporary illustration will help us appreciate Paul’s emotions at this point. A local pastor has been called to shepherd a somewhat recalcitrant congregation. They are facing a number of challenges. Their giving is not what it should be. For social and business reasons some of their members are

frequenting the local casino. There is an outstanding case of sordid immorality that the church is failing to deal with. The congregation is also wracked by schisms and divisions, and is hospitable to false teaching. Even if this church had not shown any progress in the other areas but had taken disciplinary action in the case of immorality, wouldn't this be a step in the right direction? Even though there was yet much work to be done, wouldn't this pastor be overjoyed at the progress that had already been made? At last there has been a breakthrough. He detects a genuine response to his ministry and he has reason to hope that there will be further improvements in the future. Such a pastor's situation would not be dissimilar to the challenges that Paul was facing in the Corinthian church. While there is still much room for improvement, Paul's outburst of joy is understandable in view of the genuine progress that has been made.⁷⁶

Paul's experience of joy is lavish. He does not simply rejoice but is overflowing with joy. This even represents an advance on his being "filled with comfort." He could be paraphrased as saying, "My cup is full of comfort; indeed, it overflows with joy."⁷⁷ His comfort and joy remain strong emphases throughout this chapter. Comfort is mentioned repeatedly in vv. 6, 7, 13. Equally strong is the recurrent emphasis on Paul's joy in vv. 7, 9, 13, 16, a joy he shared with Titus (v. 13). Paul's joy is therefore pivotal to an understanding of this passage as a whole. As a bridging verse, v. 4 introduces themes that will be further developed in vv. 5-16.⁷⁸ Even more remarkably, it forms the conclusion to Paul's defence of his new covenant ministry. A digression that

⁷⁶ Cf. Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 363-64: "One of Paul's remarkable God-given abilities, apparently, was a pastoral objectivity that enabled him to separate the various areas of difficulty in a church from his involvement personally. Thus, while there were such unresolved problems as those listed above, there was also the matter which had been settled, for which he gave hearty thanks, namely, the disciplining of the wrongdoer whom he had mentioned earlier (2:5-11) and whom he is about to discuss once more (7:5-16). In the midst of so many problems Paul is able to rejoice that this one difficulty – admittedly a major one – had been satisfactorily dealt with."

⁷⁷ Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 521.

⁷⁸ The transitional nature of this paragraph (vv. 2-4) can be further appreciated in its use of first person pronouns and verbs compared to the surrounding context. In 6:1-7:1 the plural is used 9x to describe Paul's ministry, but the singular only once. By way of contrast, in 7:5-16 the singular is found 11x and the plural 9x. This change of emphasis is anticipated in 7:2-4 which has seven singulars and nine plurals. This is reminiscent of the emotive language Paul used when speaking of the severe letter and the discipline of the offender in 1:23-2:11. In very personal and emotional contexts Paul often speaks in the first person singular.

began with the confronting illustration of Paul as a captive in a Roman triumphal procession (2:14-16) ends on a note of exuberant joy.

7:5-16 Fears, Joy, Regret and More Joy

Paul's major digression in 2:14-7:4 can be seen for what it is when 7:5-16 is read as the A' section that parallels the A section that ends with 2:12-13. Read together these passages connect almost seamlessly:

¹² Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord,

¹³ I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia . . .

*⁵ For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, **fears** within.*

⁶ But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus;

*⁷ and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that **I rejoiced** even more.*

*⁸ For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though **I did regret it**-- for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while-*

*⁹ **I now rejoice**, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us.*

¹⁰ For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

¹¹ For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter.

¹² So although I wrote to you it was not for the sake of the offender, nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God.

¹³ *For this reason we have been comforted. And besides our comfort, **we rejoiced** even much more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all.*

¹⁴ *For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I was not put to shame; but as we spoke all things to you in truth, so also our boasting before Titus proved to be the truth.*

¹⁵ *And his affection abounds all the more toward you, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling.*

¹⁶ ***I rejoice** that in everything I have confidence in you.*

The immediate connection between 2:12-13 and 7:5-16 is geographical. Paul's travel narrative has moved from Troas, where he had originally hoped to rendez-vous with Titus, to Macedonia. Even there Paul does not meet up with Titus immediately, but has to endure a painful wait before Titus finally arrives from Corinth with welcome news. The connection between chapters 2 and 7, however, also operates at a deeper level. Paul's discussion of the severe letter, first introduced in 2:3, seems all but abandoned by the end of the chapter. Any further consideration of that letter must wait till after Paul's in depth treatment of the paradoxical nature of his new covenant ministry, its glory through shame and joy through sorrow that are reminiscent of the death and resurrection of Jesus. In chapter 7 Paul does not merely pick up the thread of his earlier discussion after his mind has digressed to consider the wonders of new covenant theology. His return to the severe letter must be seen in the light of the intervening chapters; 7:5-16 must be read through the prism of 2:14-7:4. The Corinthian response to his letter is to be understood within the larger framework of Paul's new covenant ministry. The joy and sorrow, the pain and relief associated with the letter are another outworking, in Paul's ministry, of what it means to proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The connection between chapters 2 and 7 can also be seen in the expression of Paul's emotions. The writing of the severe letter is associated with sorrow, gladness, joy, anguish, tears and love (2:1-4). Paul's dominant emotion at the time he wrote the letter would seem to be sorrow. In chapter 7, however, even though the apostle admits to fears (v. 5) and regret (v. 8), his overwhelming emotion is joy. The only sorrow that is mentioned is that of the

Corinthians (vv. 7-11).⁷⁹ As Barnett has pointed out in his comments on 7:5-16, “Joy dominates this section. The last verse of the previous passage (v. 4) introduced joy, and it appears again at the end (v. 16) to form an *inclusio*. In each constituent passage joy is the dominant element – joy at the arrival and reports of Titus (vv. 5-7), joy that the Corinthians have repented (vv. 8-13a), and joy at Titus’ joy (vv. 13b-15).”⁸⁰

The intensity of Paul’s joy can partly be explained against the dark backdrop provided by v. 5: “For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within.” Crossing the sea from Troas to Macedonia gave Paul no relief from the affliction he was experiencing. At the end of v. 4 he had left the nature of his affliction undefined. Now he describes it as “conflicts without, fears within.” The affliction was both around him and within him. Outwardly there were conflicts, inwardly there were fears. As to the nature of the conflicts around him we can only speculate. In other NT contexts such conflicts involve quarrels (2 Tim 2:23; Tit 3:9; James 4:1). So the reference could be to strife and disputes within the Macedonian churches. However, there is little to suggest such strife in either Paul’s earlier correspondence with the Thessalonians or his later correspondence with the Philippians. This makes persecution the more likely possibility (cf. 8:1-2). Without more detailed information, however, we have no way of knowing the exact nature of the external conflicts that Paul faced in Macedonia.

⁷⁹ The Corinthians’ response to Paul’s letter should also be understood in terms of Paul’s new covenant ministry. Jonathan Kaplan, “Comfort, O Comfort, Corinth: Grief and Comfort in 2 Corinthians 7:5-13a,” *Harvard Theological Review* 104 (2011), 438-39, has observed some significant connections with the OT: “The theology of comfort articulated during and after the exile in Lamentations 1-2 and Second Isaiah informed Paul’s understanding of comfort in 2 Corinthians more broadly and in 2 Cor 7:5-13a specifically. Paul uses the language of comfort throughout 2 Corinthians to describe God’s activity among the Corinthians (see Isa 40:1) and quotes Isa 49:8 in 2 Cor 6:2 to call the Corinthians to respond to the impending reality of God’s work of reconciliation . . . Paul appropriates language from both Second Isaiah and Lamentations 1-2 as a paradigm to interpret the Corinthians’ contemporary experience, albeit through a Christological lens, and not as a promise from the Old Testament that is only fulfilled in the life of the Corinthian community.” Reading the OT “through a Christological lens” provides the hermeneutical key to understanding Paul’s new covenant ministry. While Paul clearly draws from Isaiah’s New Exodus section (Isa 40-66) in defending his apostolic ministry, his dependence on Lamentations 1-2 is less certain.

⁸⁰ Barnett, *2 Corinthians*, 366; cf. Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 523.

There is much more certainty when it comes to Paul's "fears". On an earlier occasion he had already been quite transparent with the Corinthians about the fear he experienced when he first preached the gospel to them: "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling" (1 Cor 2:3). The fear in the present context, however, is of a different order. First of all, Paul speaks of his "fears" in the plural, the only occasion in his extant correspondence where he does so. The surrounding verses make it clear why this should be the case. There were good reasons for Paul to be anxious when he reached Macedonia. The first worrying sign was that Titus had not yet arrived (2:13; 7:6). This could have triggered further fears in Paul's mind. The delay could have meant that Titus' reception in Corinth had been less than positive. How had the Corinthians reacted to the severe letter? Had it caused them unnecessary pain? Had they taken steps to discipline the offender? Had Paul's boasting to Titus about the Corinthians been unfounded and could this cause him personal embarrassment (7:14)? Then too, the delay may have sparked concerns in Paul's mind about Titus' safety in travel. Moreover, if he already knew of the intruders into the Corinthian church (11:3), he would have been anxious to know what kind of influence they were exerting. All in all, "Paul was obviously in a state of some distress as he awaited Titus' arrival in Macedonia."⁸¹ In fact, it would probably not be going too far to say that it was "multiple and disconcerting fears such as these that led to Paul's self-confessed state of depression."⁸² In the very next verse he states that "God . . . comforts the depressed" (v. 6), in all probability reckoning himself among that number.⁸³

⁸¹ Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, 144.

⁸² Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 527.

⁸³ V. 6 is an allusion to Isa 49:13 (LXX): ὁ θεὸς τοὺς ταπεινοὺς τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ παρεκάλεισεν ("God has comforted the humble [or lowly ones] of his people"). The word ταπεινός has a wide range of meanings. It is often used in an ethical sense ("lowly", "humble"), but its force can also be psychological ("downcast", "depressed"). See Hughes, *2 Corinthians*, 266. The latter sense is generally favoured by the ETs of 2 Cor 7:6: "those that are cast down" (AV), "the downhearted" (TEV), "those who are discouraged" (LB), "the downcast" (ESV, NEB, NIV, NKJV, NRSV, RSV), "the depressed" (NASB, Phillips), "the miserable" (JB), "the lowly" (RV), "the humble" (Holman, NASB marg.). BDAG, 989, has "the downcast." Barclay Newman in UBS⁴, 178, likewise suggests "downcast" or "downhearted." According to EDNT 3:333, "2 Cor 7:6 also uses the term in an ethically neutral sense; God, who comforts the *lowly/downcast* (Isa 49:13), also comforts Paul and his companions with the arrival of Titus in Macedonia (v. 5)."

Paul's emotional self-disclosure at this point is actually quite remarkable. Harris has made some perceptive observations:

While no one in the ancient world could outmatch Paul in showing fortitude in adversity, it is of particular interest that in this verse [7:5] he openly admits to being in emotional turmoil and having persistent fears. So far from being imperturbable or being a model of inner tranquility, he was deeply affected by his circumstances, especially his pastoral circumstances (cf. 11:28-29), although he was certainly not emotionally fragile.⁸⁴

The various conflicts and fears that Paul experienced seem to have had a depressing effect on him. His overall mood appears to be one of despondency. All of this was to change dramatically, however, with the coming of Titus. As Paul explains in vv. 6-7, "But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus; and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal to me; so that I rejoiced even more." Titus' arrival brings about a major turning point in the apostle's emotional state. Fears, despondency and distress make way for joy. At key points the language here echoes Paul's depiction of his recovery from his near-death experience in 1:3-11.

One of the curious features of Paul's changed mood is his claim, at the end of v. 7, that he "rejoiced even more." What is the point of the comparison? Is he claiming that his joy is even greater now than in v. 4 where he exclaimed, "I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction"? Could he be adding a comparative to the earlier superlative? Or could he be saying that his present joy was greater than his earlier distress? Another possibility would be that he rejoiced even more than he was comforted. A further suggestion might be that rather than continuing in a state of depression he experienced joy at Titus' report. While all of these explanations of the comparison have merit, the best solution is probably that Paul is describing two stages to his joy. He experienced joy at the long awaited reunion with Titus, and he experienced further joy when he heard Titus' report on his visit to Corinth.⁸⁵ Seeing his old

⁸⁴ Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 527.

⁸⁵ Thus Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 531.

friend again brought the apostle joy, but hearing of the Corinthians' longing, mourning and enthusiasm for him brought the apostle even more joy.

The main reason for Paul's joy was the Corinthians' response to the severe letter, as he immediately goes on to explain in the next verse: "For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it, - for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while" (v. 8). Paul rejoices because the letter had had the desired effect. The Corinthians had repented. Their response to the letter had been one of godly sorrow.

Paul's joy had replaced his earlier regret, an emotion that he admits to only here in all his known writings and speeches. In the emotional turmoil that preceded the coming of Titus he seems to have had second thoughts about the painful letter he had written. He knew that it would cause grief to its readers. He was therefore very sorry that he had written the letter. He wished that it could be undone⁸⁶ and was plagued by a feeling of anxiety about his past action.⁸⁷ It was not that he vacillated earlier.⁸⁸ He was deeply affected emotionally by the action he had taken.⁸⁹ He experienced painful regret, perhaps even to the point of remorse (cf. Matt 21:30, 32; 27:3). Again, all of this changed with Titus' news that the Corinthians had repented.

Hughes well illustrates the shift in the apostle's emotions by drawing on two of the greatest expositors in church history:

Both Chrysostom and Calvin liken the Apostle's feelings to those experienced by a father: the former to a father who finds regret, not pleasure, in seeing his son suffering pain under the surgeon's knife, but pleasure, not regret, in the cure that the operation is producing; the latter to a father when he finds it necessary to punish his son severely, but none the less approves the action because it is directed towards his son's welfare.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ BDAG, 639.

⁸⁷ Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 535.

⁸⁸ *TDNT* 4:628.

⁸⁹ Cf. *EDNT* 2:414, where the kind of regret Paul experienced is described as "a change not so much in consciousness as in one's feelings in relation to a thing or deed."

⁹⁰ Hughes, *2 Corinthians*, 268.

These illustrations are particularly apt given the fact that as recently as 6:13 Paul has addressed the Corinthians as “children”. The severe letter has been like the surgeon’s knife and the rod of discipline. Since the operation has been successful and the discipline effective, regret can now give way to joy. Paul’s mood has lifted completely from one of fear, regret and perhaps even depression to one of great relief and joy.

The further three references to Paul’s joy in the remainder of this chapter unpack why he “rejoiced even more” in v. 7. In each instance not only is Paul’s joy viewed from a different angle, but the reason for his joy is also explicitly stated. Every expression of joy is followed by a ὅτι clause, where in each case this conjunction is best understood in a causal sense meaning “because”. Every time the apostle gives the reason for his joy it is because one of his earlier fears has been dispelled. He is not merely saying that he rejoices but why.

- (a)** In v. 9 he rejoices not because the Corinthians were made sorrowful, but because they were made sorrowful to the point of repentance. He is eager to dispel any possible misunderstanding of the previous verse to the effect that the grief caused by his letter had given him some sinister pleasure. His joy is as genuine as their repentance. Any previous concerns he may have had about the reception of the severe letter have been dispelled.
- (b)** In v. 13 he “rejoiced even more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit had been refreshed by you all.” He had worried that when Titus arrived at Corinth he might not be well received. But rather than being rebuffed Titus had been refreshed. His reception at Corinth had given him joy. His joy proved to be contagious and it added to the joy that Paul was already experiencing.
- (c)** Finally, in v. 16 Paul rejoices because he can now have complete confidence in the Corinthians. On an earlier occasion he had boasted about them to Titus. The news Titus brought back from Corinth reassured Paul that his earlier boasting had caused him no embarrassment but had turned out to be the sober truth (v. 14).

These further references to Paul's joy also fill out his bold claim in v. 4, "I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction." He had indeed been afflicted on every side: "conflicts without: fears within" (v. 5). In all probability the external conflicts still remained, but his internal fears and earlier regrets had been dispelled by Titus' long expected arrival and welcome news. Those negative emotions had been replaced by overflowing joy. It was yet another example of the life-through-death paradox so characteristic of Paul's new covenant ministry.

So far in our discussion we have observed that Paul's emotions in 2 Corinthians follow a certain pattern. Not only do they tend to cluster around the references to the severe letter, but they are also expressive of the larger theological themes that Paul is developing in this epistle. Whether this trend will continue to the end of this letter remains to be seen. This will be the focus of my next article which is proposed for the next issue of this journal.