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## Abstract

This thesis first outlines the consensus that 2 Corinthians is a defense or an exposition of Paul's apostleship, in which Paul confronts a rebellious community with his experience of strength in weakness (e.g. 4.7a; 12.9-10). However, this major motif is rarely analyzed as a theological paradox despite being presented as two opposed but simultaneously true realities. More importantly, interpreters have not considered its relevance to the most immediate context of 2 Corinthians: a pained community (2.1-7; 7.5-16). This thesis considers the purpose of 2 Corinthians in light of Paul's paradox of strength in weakness, especially the extent to which Paul actively ministers to the Corinthians: consoling, instructing, and explaining how Christ redeems their brokenness.

An investigation of the Corinthian situation explores the use of λύπη (pain) in antiquity and considers whether the community's pains in 2.1-7 are distinct from their short-lived 'godly grief' (7.5-16). It is argued that these pains are ongoing and that the Corinthians understand weakness merely in opposition to strength, thus embodying a polarity of strength or weakness. An analysis of texts concerning strength in weakness (1.3-11; 4.7-15; 6.1-13) clarifies the nature of Paul's paradox, distinguishes it from a polarity, relates these dynamics to the literary integrity debate, and demonstrates how experiencing the paradox would enable the Corinthians' reconciliation with Paul.

Finally, an analysis of the theological climax, 12.1-10, distinguishes the proposed transformative function of the paradox from ontological and revelatory interpretations. The central thesis is that Paul presents his experience as a paradigm by which the community learns how Christ can transform their experience of pains through the strength in weakness paradox. This suggests that 2 Corinthians is neither primarily nor generally concerned with Paul's apostleship; rather, it is a pastoral document that aims to increase human potential through weakness, without rendering that weakness inherently redemptive.

# Pain and Paradox

The Transformative Function of Strength in Weakness in 2 Corinthians

By

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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at the

University of Durham

Department of Theology and Religion

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## Abbreviations

CWE....*Collected Works of Erasmus*. 89 vols. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975-2018.

SOED....Lesley Brown, ed. *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

LB....J. Le Clerc, ed. *Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami opera omnia* (Leiden: 1703-06; repr. 1961-62).

LW....Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds. *Luther's Works*. 55 vols. St Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-1986.

WA.... *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Schriften)*. 65 vols. Weimar: H. Bohlau, 1883-1993.

All other abbreviations adhere to the forms found in *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014).

## Copyright

*The copyright of this thesis rests with the author. No quotation from it should be published without the author's prior written consent and information derived from it should be acknowledged.*

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If I could trace the development of my interest in 2 Corinthians to anyone, it would have to be Dr. Michael Knowles of McMaster Divinity College. As I was trying to find the school's library one summer afternoon (there isn't one—at least, not in-house), he invited me (a total stranger) into his office and proceeded to learn all about my life, not least my plans to complete a PhD in the UK. While he had not heard of John Barclay, he had very definite ideas about my research proposal. His criticisms largely stemmed from his recent work on Paul's theology of preaching in 2 Corinthians, and although I wrestled with his ideas at the time, I was enamoured by his expression of the radical and countercultural theology of this oft-overlooked letter. This project ultimately takes issue with some of the ideas that Michael offered me that day, but he is still an inspiration and, I suspect, we could have another long, impromptu conversation about what I have learned in recent years.

Beyond the initial genesis of my interest, the person who most directly influenced this project is my *Doktorvater*, John Barclay. One of my motivations for studying in Durham was John's reputation as an excellent academic and person, and he has more than proven this reputation to be correct on both counts. His insight, guidance, and penetrating observation have greatly improved the final product. It has been a privilege to study under

him and to re-kindle a connection between our families that dates back to WWII. My secondary supervisor, Dorothea Bertschmann, has been of immense help and gave advice at crucial points in the project's development, not least toward the end when her research interests began to merge with some of my own. I also had a wonderful circle of friends during my time in Durham, including Justin Allison, who kindly read sections of this thesis and regularly discussed portions of the Corinthian correspondence with me. Stephen Campbell was a faithful companion, listening frequently to my ideas and offering helpful feedback. Others deserving special mention include Jon Bentall, Richard Rohlfing, Jameson Ross, Justin Lee, Dave Merrill, Tavis Bohlinger, Adam Shaeffer, Madison Pierce, Joe Triolo, and many others who I cannot mention here. I suspect that my time with these friends and the many long hours at my desk in 50 N. Bailey will be remembered simultaneously as some of the hardest and happiest times in my life. I also received encouragement from Philip Plyming and Andy Byers of Cranmer Hall, both of whom always spoke so positively of this project and my goals. The influence of my time with the Center for Pastor Theologians in Chicago will be evident, although my belief that academic theology can be helpful to practitioners was forged long ago in the fire of my own personal devotion and reading the likes of Calvin and Luther—even Lewis and the Inklings. Much credit should also go to my early teachers, who helped me to take my first steps as a theological thinker and would, I hope, be pleased with the results so far: Mariam Kamell Kovalishyn, Sven Soderlund, Phil Long, J.I. Packer and Iain Provan of Regent College; and Jeremy Bergen and Derek Suderman of Conrad Grebel University College.

Finally, I want to thank my family, especially my parents Mark and Ruth White, who instilled in me a love for Scripture and pointed me to theologians who, unbeknownst to them, would take me on a journey that has yet to end. They also generously supported

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*Soli Deo Gloria.*

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

'Paul never spoke other than as a pastor'.<sup>1</sup> While this claim by Dunn may be overstated, Paul's deep interest in his communities—not least his effort to see others transformed by his gospel concerning Jesus Christ—has been a recent point of scholarly emphasis.<sup>2</sup> The apostle carries an undeniable 'anxiety for all the churches' (2 Cor 11.28).<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, in the study of 2 Corinthians, Paul is depicted in a manner that is not easily reconciled with this portrayal: he is so self-focused, stern, and defensive that one might wonder what has happened to him. Interpreters point to the Corinthians, who are rebelling against Paul's leadership due to the claims of opponents that he is weak in appearance and speech (e.g. 10.10).<sup>4</sup> In response, Paul is widely understood to offer a 'defense' of the apostolic ministry.<sup>5</sup> He even formulates a 'rhetorical flourish' to turn the tables: his experience of the strength in weakness paradox.<sup>6</sup> This paradox possesses both literary and theological dimensions,<sup>7</sup> and it is presented using a variety of closely related terms. Paul

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<sup>1</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 626.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 6; John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2015), 573-574; Brian S. Rosner, Andrew S. Malone, and Trevor J. Burke, eds., *Paul as Pastor* (New York: T&T Clark, 2017), xi; Tom Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (London: SPCK, 2018), 404-05.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Greek and German sources are mine and NT passages are taken from NA28.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Dieter Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians*, SNTW (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 1-10; Jerry Sumney, *Identifying Paul's Opponents: The Question of Method in 2 Corinthians* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 9-12.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Timothy Savage, *Power Through Weakness: Paul's Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians*, SNTSMS 86 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 99; John T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence*, SBLDS 99 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 1988), 160; Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 21; Hans Dieter Betz, *Der Apostel Paulus und die sokratische Tradition: eine exegetische Untersuchung zu seiner Apologie 2 Korinther 10-13*, BHT 45 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1972), 132.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas D. Stegman, *Second Corinthians*, CCSS (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 250. Also Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1994), 35-68 and Fredrick J. Long, *Ancient Rhetoric and Paul's Apology: The Compositional Unity of 2 Corinthians*, SNTSMS 131 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 230.

<sup>7</sup> The context will generally indicate whether I am using the term 'paradox' to refer to one dimension or the other. As the thesis progresses, my analysis is increasingly theological. See esp. sec. VII.iii of Ch. 3.

refers to his possession of the 'treasure [θησαυρός] in jars of clay [ὄστράκιος σκεῦος]' (4.7), his experience of receiving the 'sentence of death [θάνατος]' only to be saved by 'the God who raises [ἐγείρω] the dead [νεκρός]' (1.8-11), or his revelation that 'power [δύναμις] is perfected in weakness [ἀσθένεια]' (12.9).<sup>8</sup> In most cases, Paul presents this paradox as two opposed realities that are simultaneously true.<sup>9</sup> This includes 12.9-10, where the paradox is widely seen as the 'summit' of 2 Corinthians.<sup>10</sup> It proclaims that Paul experiences divine power in the midst of his weakness: 'when I am weak, then I am strong' (12.10). However, as I show below, interpreters rarely consider the paradox's potential ramifications for the Corinthians' experience despite its apparent significance for Paul's argument. In fact, the paradox's emphasis on Paul's experience leads Hafemann to argue that Paul is 'didactic' in 1 Corinthians, but he embraces 'apologetic' in 2 Corinthians.<sup>11</sup> This proposed departure raises the question: is Paul only *defending his ministry* in 2 Corinthians or is he also *actively ministering* to the community? If the latter, how might the Corinthians benefit from hearing of Paul's experience of strength in weakness?

To be clear, I do not intend to create a dichotomy between Paul's apologetic impulses and his broader pastoral agenda; in fact, most interpreters rightly conclude that

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<sup>8</sup> See sec. IV.i.a of Ch. 2 for further discussion on why passages that lack the *δυν-* or *ἀσθεν-* word groups can be read as examples of the strength in weakness paradox.

<sup>9</sup> Gerhard Hotze, *Paradoxien bei Paulus: Untersuchungen zu einer elementaren Denkform in seiner Theologie*, Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen 33 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1997), 27-30, 35. Also Edmund B. Keller, *Some Paradoxes of Paul* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1974), 11 and Karl A. Plank, 'Confronting the Unredeemed World: A Paradoxical Paul and His Modern Critics', *Anglican Theological Review* 67, no. 2 (April 1985): 127-36 [131]. This definition is a slightly developed version of the definition often given to a literary or theological paradox. For instance, A.G. Lee in his introduction to Cicero's *Paradoxa Stoicorum* (London: MacMillan & Co., 1953): 'The word [paradox] is applied to a statement "seemingly self-contradictory or absurd, though possibly well-founded or essentially true"' (p. ix). For more on rhetorical paradox in antiquity, see Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 48-59. More generally, see Henning Schröer, *Die Denkform der Paradoxalität als theologisches Problem. Eine Untersuchung zu Kierkegaard und der neueren Theologie als Beitrag zur theologischen Logik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 28.

<sup>10</sup> Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962), 451. Also e.g. P. J. Gräbe, 'The All-Surpassing Power of God through the Holy Spirit in the Midst of Our Broken Earthly Existence: Perspectives on Paul's Use of Dynamis in 2 Corinthians', *NeoT* 28, no. 1 (1994): 147-56 [150]; Savage, *Weakness*, 1; Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 465. For more on the paradox's occurrence throughout 2 Corinthians, see p. 7-8 below and sec. IV.i of Chapter 2.

<sup>11</sup> Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 29.



the apostle's defense is meant to build up the Corinthians (e.g. 12.19).<sup>12</sup> But as I explain below, the field continues to classify the material largely as a defense or an exposition of the apostleship and, above all, fails to investigate the overarching framework which Paul's argument is said to serve.<sup>13</sup> So the question of whether Paul is defending his ministry or actively ministering is a matter of penetrating to the *essence* of 2 Corinthians. There are undeniable points of defense and rebuke (e.g. 3.1-3; 11.1-6); nonetheless, my project considers whether Paul moves beyond these elements—whether he consoles, instructs, and explains how Christ redeems the community's brokenness. In this sense, I consider whether 2 Corinthians speaks more *directly* and *deeply* to the community than previously thought. But to grasp the significance of this focus, one must further consider 2 Corinthians scholarship, where the apologetic reading forms a paradigm that permeates the field.<sup>14</sup>

## I. An Apologetic Paul: The Prevailing Paradigm in 2 Corinthians Studies

The material constituting 2 Corinthians is often described as 'explosive' and 'incendiary'.<sup>15</sup> After discussing a variety of issues in 1 Corinthians, it is commonly held that the conflict between Paul and Corinth rapidly changes due to two events: an offense committed against Paul's authority that pains both apostle and community (2.1-7; 7.5-16) and the arrival of a mysterious group of opponents labelled 'super-apostles' (11.5).<sup>16</sup> Barth describes the dominant approach to 2 Corinthians with the quip that it is the 'harrassed, long-drawn-out sigh' of a beleaguered apostle.<sup>17</sup> The Corinthians are in danger of

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<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Margaret Thrall, *II Corinthians 8-13*, vol. 2, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 860-861; Stegman, *Corinthians*, 282; Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 487.

<sup>13</sup> See p. 11-12 below. For further discussion, see sec.V.iii of Chapter 5.

<sup>14</sup> The language of 'paradigm', 'anomaly', and 'crisis' in this chapter are borrowed from Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 35-65.

<sup>15</sup> Calvin J. Roetzel, *2 Corinthians*, ANTC (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. C. K. Barrett, 'Ο ΑΔΙΚΗΣΑΣ (2 Cor. 7.12)', in *Essays on Paul* (London: SPCK Publishing, 1982) 108-117; Margaret Thrall, *II Corinthians 1-7*, vol. 1, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 61-69; L. L. Welborn, *An End to Enmity: Paul and the "Wrongdoer" of Second Corinthians*, BZNW 185 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 23-211.

<sup>17</sup> Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, 5th ed. (München: Chr. Kaiser, 1929), 241.

abandoning Paul, and the apostle appears to respond with a series of crisis arguments, goading the Corinthians to re-affirm their commitment (e.g. 6.10-13; 12.14-15). This view is so influential that *none* of the major interpreters of the last century fail to characterize the material as largely or wholly apologetic. The only possible exception are those interpreters—headed by Gorman and Stegman—who understand the material to be an exposition of the apostleship, where Paul explains his Christ-like behaviour and tries to instill it in Corinth.<sup>18</sup> But for a variety of reasons, not least being that they remain fixated on Paul's experience, these interpreters do not escape the prevailing paradigm.<sup>19</sup> The uniformity of interpretation is sufficient for Bultmann to conclude that 'the only question of introduction that needs mentioning concerns the situation from which 2 Corinthians was written.'<sup>20</sup> Plummer likewise insists that Paul's focus is 'plain enough' and 'sure ground': he deals with a 'very serious crisis' in which 'his Apostolic authority had been opposed'.<sup>21</sup> More recently, Schmeller reiterates—without critical discussion—that the central concern of 2 Corinthians is the 'correct assessment' of the Pauline ministry.<sup>22</sup>

The confidence in the apologetic reading of 2 Corinthians becomes more surprising in light of Paul's tender attention to his fractured relationship with Corinth (e.g. 2.1-7; 7.5-16). He expresses his love for the community (2.4) and his regret at the thought of the

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<sup>18</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 1-8; 268-303; Thomas Stegman, *The Character of Jesus: The Linchpin to Paul's Argument in 2 Corinthians*, AnBib 158 (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005), 304; C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, BNTC (London: A & C Black, 1973), 243; Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, vol. 32A, AB (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1995), 42, 44; Jan Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, SP 8 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>19</sup> E.g. Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 202, 239; Stegman, *Character*, 304. For further discussion (and critique) of these interpreters, see p. 10-11, 18-19 below.

<sup>20</sup> Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *Second Letter to the Corinthians*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1985), 19. To be fair, Bultmann makes this statement after a brief discussion of the material's purpose. The statement is still significant because Bultmann aligns with the apologetic view yet does not provide a developed discussion on his rationale despite his awareness of the paradigm's difficulties (p. 18).

<sup>21</sup> Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1915), xiv.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Schmeller, *Der Zweite Brief an Die Korinther*, vol. 1, KEK 2/8 (Zürich: Patmos-Verlag, 2010), 17.

community being pained (7.8). Although it appears plausible that the Corinthians are in need of more than a verbal drubbing—the pain stemming from Paul's previous visit affected 'every one [πᾶς] of the Corinthians (2.5)—most interpreters assume that this emotive struggle is identical to the 'godly grief [κατὰ θεὸν λύπη]' (7.5-16).<sup>23</sup> This emotion endured 'only for a while [εἰ καὶ πρὸς ὥραν]' (v. 7) and resulted in 'repentance [μετάνοια]' (v. 9), thus suggesting that the community's pain quickly ceased. Consequently, the Corinthians are not typically portrayed as a humbled or hurting party; rather, they are rebellious converts who believe they have become 'strong' enough (13.9) to distinguish themselves from their apostle. They accuse Paul of insincerity (1.15-22), a refusal of support (11.7-15), and poor appearance and speech (10.10). Such accusations serve as a key ground of support for the prevailing paradigm.<sup>24</sup>

A decision to follow the above reading of the Corinthian conflict creates the need to identify and characterize the anonymous opponents who embolden this troubled community. In fact, a whole sub-field of literature on this topic has appeared with key contributions from Georgi, Sumney, and Welborn.<sup>25</sup> The opponents are typically read as either law-touting Judaizers, super-spiritual teachers, or Gnostic philosophers, but a clear consensus has not yet emerged.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, these mysterious individuals remain a focus of discussion concerning the changes of tone and literary breaks found throughout 2

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<sup>23</sup> See e.g. A. E. Harvey, *Renewal Through Suffering: A Study of 2 Corinthians*, SNTW (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 43-4 and George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 376; Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:490. For further discussion, see sec. I of ch. 2.

<sup>24</sup> See e.g. Betz, *Sokratische*, 44-69; Calvin J. Roetzel, 'The Language of War (2 Cor. 10:1-6) and the Language of Weakness (2 Cor. 11.21b-13:10)', *Biblical Interpretation* 17 (2009): 77-99 [78-81]; Lars Aejmelaeus, *Schwachheit als Waffe: Die Argumentation des Paulus im Tränenbrief* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 11-46; Paul Duff, *Moses in Corinth: The Apologetic Context of 2 Corinthians 3* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1-17.

<sup>25</sup> Georgi, *Opponents*, 1-10; Sumney, *Opponents*, 1-18; Welborn, *Wrongdoer*, 1-52.

<sup>26</sup> See the excellent overview of the various options in Sumney, *Opponents*, 15-42. I provide further discussion on these options in sec. II.ii of Ch. 5.

Corinthians.<sup>27</sup> My analysis of these issues occurs later,<sup>28</sup> but a common response to the literary integrity problem is Bornkamm's proposal that the canonical letter is a series of separate documents (later joined by an editor) that originate from different phases in the conflict: 2.14-6.13, 7.2-4 (an early, subtle apology); 10.1-13.14 (the harsh, painful letter); 1.1-2.13, 7.5-16 (a later, reconciliatory letter).<sup>29</sup> A determining characteristic of each letter relates to Paul's engagement with the opponents—in the subtle apology, for instance, Paul 'speaks with clear superiority', whereas he appears in the painful letter in 'an almost hopeless position'.<sup>30</sup> Alongside of these arguments is an increasing number of unity theories, led by Vegge, Witherington, and Long, who believe that 2 Corinthians is rhetorically coherent even if it contains some disparate sections.<sup>31</sup> These conclusions are nonetheless reached in the confines of an apologetic reading: Paul's rhetoric is formulated to 'persuade'.<sup>32</sup>

All of the above must be understood, however, with respect to the summit of the material in 2 Corinthians, which is—as noted above—Paul's experience of strength in weakness. The existence of any 'summit' in 2 Corinthians is notable not least because the material is typically understood to be totally disparate, as suggested by the prevalence of partition theories. But interpreters continue to return to the meta-theme of strength in weakness, which occurs in various forms that coalesce upon Paul's experience of divine

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<sup>27</sup> Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005), 51 suggests that there is a connection between the purpose of 2 Corinthians and how one understands the integrity problem—if Paul is defending himself, then how the canonical letter is partitioned will be based upon the nature of the conflict and its participants.

<sup>28</sup> See sec. IV.ii of Chapter 2. For the time being, I do not assume a particular position on the issue.

<sup>29</sup> Günther Bornkamm, 'History of the Origin of the So-Called Second Letter to the Corinthians', *NTS* 8, no. 3 (1962): 258–64 [258–61]. See the excellent summary of partition theories in Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:3–48.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>31</sup> Ivar Vegge, *2 Corinthians--a Letter about Reconciliation: A Psychagogical, Epistolographical, and Rhetorical Analysis*, WUNT 239 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 389. Witherington, *Corinth*, 69–77; Long, *Rhetoric*, 1–16. See sec. IV.iii of Ch. 2 for further discussion.

<sup>32</sup> Witherington, *Corinthians*, 145.

power in weakness.<sup>33</sup> The theme is not limited to a particular partition, and it incorporates several of the apostle's climactic statements from across the material: the possession of the 'treasure in jars of clay' (4.7); his description of 'receiving the sentence of death' only to be saved by 'the God who raises the dead' (1.8-11); and the assertion 'when I am weak, then I am strong' (12.10). But interpreters typically place a chasm between these experiences and the attitude of the Corinthians. Not only do the community's beliefs and values contradict Paul's argument—they indulge in boasting (11.21b), demand references (3.1), obsess about honour (10.12)—the apostle never seems to explicitly relate his experiences to the community's.<sup>34</sup> God's power is not meant to comfort the Corinthians; rather, it confronts them with the authority of Paul's apostolic call. Despite the seemingly formative nature of strength in weakness for Paul, some interpreters repeatedly describe this experience as a paradox without explaining what is denoted by this term.<sup>35</sup> Still others—such as Heckel and Hotze—conclude that Paul's experience of strength in weakness is an equivocation.<sup>36</sup> Its significance lies merely in its ironic take on the will to power: Paul is the superior apostle, even if he is weak. Consequently, the strength in weakness paradox is resoundingly 'offensive'.<sup>37</sup> The Corinthians must embrace Paul's superiority, willing themselves to reconciliation, or else reap the consequences of apostasy (e.g. 13.5).<sup>38</sup>

As a result of this overview, it is evident that the interpretation of 2 Corinthians involves a variety of interconnected issues—the community's pain, the opponents, the

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<sup>33</sup> E.g. Savage, *Weakness*, 187-90 and Harvey, *Renewal*, 104. See sec. IV.i of Chapter 2 for a thorough justification of reading the paradox beyond the occurrence of *δυν-* and *ἀσθεν-* words.

<sup>34</sup> Brian Dodd, *Paul's Paradigmatic "I": Personal Example as Literary Strategy*, JSNTS 177 (Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 30; Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 466; Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:831; Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 206.

<sup>35</sup> See e.g. Savage, *Weakness*, 16; Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 249; Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 268-303.

<sup>36</sup> Ulrich Heckel, *Kraft in Schwachheit: Untersuchungen zu 2. Kor 10-13*, WUNT 56 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 115; Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 218-19.

<sup>37</sup> Savage, *Power*, 99.

<sup>38</sup> So David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 545: The Corinthians must 'conduct a spiritual audit on themselves to see how they check out as Christians'. Also see Schmeller, *Korinther*, I:365-66 and Harris, *Corinthians*, 924.

history of composition, and the strength in weakness paradox—all of which presently contribute to the sense that Paul is delivering a defense or exposition of his ministry. As a result, the prevailing paradigm is too widespread for a focused study to truly endanger it, and it is so entrenched that it is difficult to envision how a larger study could unravel it. But as I demonstrate in the following sub-section, it seems that the confident, rapid assertions of the field have rendered it vulnerable to the charge of offering a selective reading of the material.<sup>39</sup>

## II. Anomalies in the Paradigm—a Possible Crisis?

An immediate point of resistance to the prevailing paradigm comes at the beginning of 2 Corinthians: Paul does not refer to the opponents or to the Corinthians' pride. Instead, the Corinthians are portrayed as those who 'patiently endure [ἐν ὑπομονῇ]' the 'same sufferings [αὐτῶν παθημάτων]' as Paul (1.6b). Far from the combative apostle, Paul states that he suffers for the Corinthians' 'comfort and salvation [παρακλήσεως καὶ σωτηρίας]' (v. 6a). This proclamation becomes even more confusing for the prevailing paradigm if one accepts that, like the rest of Paul's corpus, the thanksgiving is programmatic for the material generally.<sup>40</sup> Of course, many interpreters explain this quandary by suggesting that 1.3-7 is actually the beginning of a conciliatory letter that was written at the end of the conflict between Paul and Corinth (i.e. 1.1-2.4; 7.5-16).<sup>41</sup> But a key theme of this document is said to be the *resolution* of the Corinthians' pain—so why does Paul act as though the community is suffering?

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<sup>39</sup> While the *origin* of the prevailing paradigm is an important issue, I am far more concerned with its present *existence*. If I had to identify its starting point in critical scholarship, I would suggest Betz's *Sokratische*, esp. 44-69. But it clearly has its roots in prior scholarship (cf. e.g. Plummer, *Corinthians*, xiv).

<sup>40</sup> E.g. Rom. 1.1-5; Gal. 1.1; P.T. O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul*, NovTSup 49 (Leiden: Brill), 1-10.

<sup>41</sup> For more on this explanation, see sec. IV.iii of Ch. 2.

Related to this issue are two studies by Welborn concerning the pain created by Paul's previous visit and letter (2.1-7; 7.5-16). The first considers Paul's argument in light of the ancient 'pathetic proofs', where a rhetor attempts to 'implant conviction' with respect to the emotions.<sup>42</sup> Welborn concludes that Paul's series of self-portrayals in which he experiences a shift in his emotions (1.8-11; 7.5-16) are meant to communicate to the Corinthians that they can experience this same transformation in Christ.<sup>43</sup> Alternatively, Welborn contextualizes Paul's discussion of the Corinthians' pain with the methods of ancient psychagogy, suggesting that the apostle creates an 'emotional therapy' for the Corinthians.<sup>44</sup> Welborn argues that rather than pushing the community to overcome their pain, the apostle points to Christ's suffering and passion, which sanctifies a certain form of pain (7.10) and allows it to have a constructive role within the community (7.11).<sup>45</sup> The combined effect of these studies is the emergence of a new dimension to Paul's response: his comforting of the community's pain. This raises a rash of questions about 2 Corinthians: might Paul's argument about strength in weakness be related to the issue of pain? How can one be certain that the community's pain is ongoing (cf. 7.8)? Could Paul's comforting agenda be expanded beyond 1.1-2.13; 7.5-16? Unfortunately, Welborn's arguments are limited in scope and, although they have the potential to overturn major conclusions about 2 Corinthians, there is no acknowledgment of this possibility. In this way, the paradigm exerts its influence: even studies which inherently raise doubts about its veracity are left to operate within its bounds.

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<sup>42</sup> Laurence L. Welborn, 'Paul's Appeal to the Emotions in 2 Corinthians 1.1-2.13; 7.5-16', *JSNT* 82 (June 2001): 31-60 [34].

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-9.

<sup>44</sup> L. L. Welborn, 'Paul and Pain: Paul's Emotional Therapy in 2 Corinthians 1.1-2.13; 7.5-16 in the Context of Ancient Psychagogic Literature', *NTS* 57, no. 4 (October 2011): 547-570 [547-48]. Also see Welborn, *Enmity*, 43-52.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 569-71.

But there are a couple of voices that have openly questioned the modern reading of 2 Corinthians. Paul often turns autobiographical in delivering his strength in weakness argument, and generally, such discourses have been viewed as apologetic tools.<sup>46</sup> But through the work of Ellington and Stegman, Paul's strength in weakness discourses have been re-envisioned as hortatory passages.<sup>47</sup> The most direct assault to date on the current research paradigm is given in Ellington's article on Paul's use of first-person pronouns in 2 Cor. 10-13, where it is argued that Paul's experience of strength in weakness is instructive for the Corinthians through their participation with Christ.<sup>48</sup> The difficulty, however, with the approach of Ellington and Stegman is that they do not deeply engage with strength in weakness to determine how it might specifically benefit the Corinthians. Most importantly, they do not propose an alternative situation which explains why the Corinthians are weak and in need of Paul's experience in the first place. So it is much easier to continue viewing these discourses as merely self-referential and apologetic.

Perhaps the most significant anomaly is that Paul himself draws the present paradigm into question in 12.19: 'Have you been supposing all along that we have been defending ourselves [ὅμῃν ἀπολογούμεθα] to you? It is...all for your upbuilding [ὅμῶν οἰκοδομῆς], beloved'. To be fair, there is a level of irony here: Paul certainly defends his ministry in 2 Corinthians.<sup>49</sup> But, as many commentators suggest, he clarifies that this defense has been serving the broader goal of deepening the Corinthians' commitment to

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<sup>46</sup> See the excellent literature review in George Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography: Toward a New Understanding*, SBLDS 73 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 75-83.

<sup>47</sup> Dustin Watson Ellington, "'Imitate Me': Participation in Christ and Paul's Vocational Model for the Church in 1-2 Corinthians' (Ph.D. thesis, Duke University, 2004), 144-256; Thomas Stegman, *The Character of Jesus: The Linchpin to Paul's Argument in 2 Corinthians*, AnBib 158 (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005), 304-76.

<sup>48</sup> Dustin Ellington, 'Not Applicable to Believers? The Aims and Basis of Paul's 'I' in 2 Corinthians 10-13', *JBL* 131, no. 2 (2012): 325-40 [339-40].

<sup>49</sup> E.g. 2 Cor. 3.1-3; 10.7; 11.7-11.



Christ.<sup>50</sup> Such concessions are not, however, developed further in the literature, and this caveat is generally overlooked by modern interpreters—if Paul says he is not simply defending his ministry, why is the material so often characterized in this way?<sup>51</sup> Paul's remark points to the possibility that, enveloping his defense, there is an agenda that has yet to be defined and explored.

Finally, in the latter stages of 2 Corinthians, Paul becomes more explicit in his engagement with the Corinthian community: 'Test yourselves [ἐαυτοὺς πειράζετε]. Or do you not realize this about yourselves: that Jesus Christ is in you [Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν]—unless you fail to meet the test!' (13.5). This is arguably *not* the kind of conclusion that one would expect for a thoroughgoing *apologia*, whether it is the end of a unified letter or the harsh letter of chs. 10-13. There is also the variety of inherently transformative terms and phrases that Paul employs throughout the material—his climactic interest in grace (12.9), the focus on inner renewal (1.8-9; 4.16), and Paul's calls for reciprocity (5.15; 6.11-13; 12.15; 13.8-9). The placement of the latter is especially interesting given that it often comes immediately after a strength in weakness discourse (e.g. 6.11-13; 12.15). As mentioned above, this is typically explained by Paul's defense: if the Corinthians become convinced of Paul's superiority they will choose to reciprocate his love for them.<sup>52</sup> But is it possible that Paul's strength in weakness discourses reveal Christ's redemption of human weakness—for a community which appears to have Jesus 'in them'—and thus helps the Corinthians to reconcile with their apostle?

The questions produced by these textual anomalies serve as a series of bad omens for the prevailing paradigm of 2 Corinthians. While this paradigm offers legitimate

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<sup>50</sup> Mark Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Nottingham: Apollos, 2014), 466-68; Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 616-18; Harris, *Corinthians*, 894-96.

<sup>51</sup> E.g. Savage, *Weakness*, 11, 187-190; Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 202; Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 487; Witherington, *Corinthians*, 333.

<sup>52</sup> See esp. sec. V.i of Ch. 4 for further discussion.

insights, including the community's significant objections to Paul and his ministry and the apostle's need to vindicate himself, it appears at risk of deeming these largely *circumstantial* issues to be the centre of gravity in 2 Corinthians. The observations above, however, suggest that the Corinthians may have a more private, emotive problem (of which their rebellion against Paul is simply a symptom) and Paul's response, girded with a series of self-referential defenses, climaxes in the *theological* task of describing the implications of the 'Christ...in you' (13.5). It seems advisable, if not necessary, that some solutions be sought for this emerging dilemma. Of course, possessing a plethora of questions is not new in the study of this genuinely difficult material. More than a century ago, Plummer was comparing the interpretation of 1 Corinthians with that of 2 Corinthians by likening it to 'the passage from the somewhat intricate paths of a carefully laid-out park to the obscurity of a pathless forest....The forest is not only obscure, it is thick with roots which trip one up.'<sup>53</sup> Here Plummer is referring largely to the questions created by the literary integrity problem in 2 Corinthians. But in light of the anomalies above, it is likely that issues in the apologetic reading of the text contribute to the degree of interpretive difficulty. The field is in the midst of a subtle crisis in which the 'awareness of anomaly' is significant, but not dominant.<sup>54</sup> The work of Ellington, Stegman, and Welborn has brought the field to an early staging ground, where it could move in a new direction, but it is one that has yet to be fully defined, let alone proven. In order to determine whether the prospect of a paradigm shift is real—where a study reaches conclusions that are 'sufficiently unprecedented' so as to 'leave all sorts of problems' for researchers—one needs to consider the work completed on the strength in weakness paradox.<sup>55</sup> If there are

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<sup>53</sup> Plummer, *Corinthians*, xiii.

<sup>54</sup> Kuhn, *Revolutions*, 66.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

problems with the prevailing interpretations of 2 Corinthians, it is likeliest to be present within the theological substance of Paul's response to the community.

### III. Readings of Strength in Weakness in 2 Corinthians

Although any study of 2 Corinthians must acknowledge the strength in weakness theme, the following survey is focused upon those works within 2 Corinthians studies which are devoted to this theme. It begins with the first extended analysis of 'weakness' in Paul, followed by an array of English and German works. Each summary and appraisal remains brief to allow for deeper engagement in the exegetical chapters of this thesis.

#### *i. David Alan Black (1984)*

Black represents the first comprehensive study of Paul's ἀσθεν- language. He argues that Paul generally uses these terms in 'nonliteral' ways (i.e. not referring to physical weakness), especially as a 'sign' not only of 'humanity but of his apostleship'.<sup>56</sup> In 2 Corinthians, Paul views his weaknesses as 'a means to the realization of God's strength'.<sup>57</sup> Black summarizes Paul's use of ἀσθεν- terms with three headings: 'Weakness as a sign of humanity', 'Weakness as a showplace of God's might', and 'Weakness in the Church'.<sup>58</sup> For my purposes, it is significant that Black interprets weakness language in 2 Corinthians 10-13 as a crucial part of 'the apostle's arguments against his Corinthian opponents'.<sup>59</sup>

Black's survey is certainly helpful for gaining insight on Paul's use of a particular word group and, in this sense, it is a valuable reference work. But his decision to focus only on those passages which include an ἀσθεν- word seems limiting when crucial metaphors, such as the 'treasure in jars of clay' (2 Cor. 4.7), may be relevant to the strength

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<sup>56</sup> David Alan Black, *Paul, Apostle of Weakness* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), 170.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 228-253.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

in weakness paradox.<sup>60</sup> But perhaps the greatest issue is the vague analytical work. For instance, in 2 Cor. 12.9-10, how is God's strength 'realized' in weakness—is it realized in one's knowledge, behaviour, or both? How is this apparent contradiction even possible? Black provides thorough exegesis, but is often unclear about its precise theological significance.

*ii. Anthony Harvey (1996)*

Harvey's thesis offers perspective on the lived reality behind 2 Corinthians: he argues that Paul's autobiographical discourses on suffering were shaped by the near-death experience in Asia (2 Cor. 1.8-11). Here Paul was saved from death and consequently changed his views about suffering.<sup>61</sup> Prior to this experience, such as in 1 Corinthians, Harvey contends that Paul viewed suffering as a terrible reality (e.g. 1 Cor. 15.30-32). But in 2 Corinthians, it becomes an experience that brings 'the sufferer closer to Christ'.<sup>62</sup> This provides a clear solution for the origin of Paul's unique strength in weakness language and distinguishes the apostle's view of suffering as one that is 'without precedent in any Jewish or pagan sources known to us, and is hard to parallel in...any other major religion.'<sup>63</sup>

Although Harvey's thesis can be challenged—even in 2 Corinthians, Paul appears fearful of certain forms of suffering (e.g. 2.4; 7.10)—it does provide a helpful counterpoint to rhetorical studies which suggest that the strength in weakness paradox was utilized purely for persuasion.<sup>64</sup> The irony is that Harvey envisions a deeply personal dimension to Paul's argument—the volume is titled *Renewal Through Suffering*—yet he does not

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<sup>60</sup> The need to expand the breadth of analysis is implicitly recognized by Savage, *Power*, 164-86 and Kar Yong Lim, "The Sufferings of Christ Are Abundant in Us": A Narrative Dynamics Investigation of Paul's Sufferings in 2 Corinthians, LNTS 399 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2009), 40-157. See sec. IV.i of Ch. 2 for further discussion.

<sup>61</sup> Harvey, *Renewal*, 21-7.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> See fnnt. 31-32 above.

develop the sense in which Paul experiences this renewal. Harvey seems more interested in the significance of 2 Corinthians for the history of religions and, ultimately, he believes Paul's change of heart on suffering is apologetic: it defeats Corinthian claims about his ministry.<sup>65</sup>

*iii. Timothy Savage (1996)*

Perhaps the most widely-read volume in the field, Savage begins by highlighting the importance of 2 Corinthians for what it means to be 'a minister of Christ'.<sup>66</sup> He pursues this interest through a broad contextualization of the strength in weakness theme. He surveys Greco-Roman attitudes on status, self-display, eloquence, and boasting.<sup>67</sup> This leads to the conclusion that Paul's converts were highly influenced by their surroundings, thus suggesting that the conflict in 2 Corinthians is caused by two opposing worldviews.<sup>68</sup> Savage then explores Paul's sufferings in 2 Corinthians 1-4, arguing that the apostle overturns the cultural consensus on the issues outlined above. In this sense, Paul's ministry is a countercultural engagement in which weakness represents 'the power of God' in its 'mightiest expression'.<sup>69</sup>

The singular achievement of Savage's work is a historically and culturally sophisticated reading of Paul's strength in weakness argument. However, Savage does not truly advance our understanding of the argument's theological dimensions. His interest in Paul's *ministry* brings the prevailing research paradigm into sharp focus: what becomes significant about Paul is his countercultural polemics, which represent a unique worldview. Although Savage repeatedly describes Paul as a minister of Christ, this minister only

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 35-46.

<sup>66</sup> Savage, *Power*, 1.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 19-102.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 189.

*discusses* his ministry with the Corinthians and never truly *ministers*. This leads back to one of the questions posed earlier in this chapter: is there some sense in which Paul's argument benefits the community beyond simply convincing them of his superiority?

*iv. Raymond Pickett (1997)*

Pickett's work represents an early breakthrough in modern 2 Corinthians studies. Utilizing the sociology of knowledge, especially Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality*, Pickett suggests that interpreters move beyond the ideas represented by the cross of Jesus to 'the social norms and values which it supports.'<sup>70</sup> He begins in 1 Corinthians before proceeding to 2 Corinthians and arguing that Paul uses Jesus's death to encourage the Corinthians to adopt an attitude of love and service.<sup>71</sup> In this sense, the Corinthian conflict is 'fundamentally related to a quandary centred around values.'<sup>72</sup>

This study is helpful because, perhaps for the first time in the modern era, one finds a detailed reading of texts in 2 Corinthians where Paul's strength in weakness discourses are significant for the life of the community. However, Pickett's conclusions should not be exaggerated: he situates his reading within the framework of an apology, perhaps because his study is limited to two texts (i.e. 4.7-5.19 and chs. 10-13) and lacks sufficient evidence to make a greater claim.<sup>73</sup> Although his work does not sufficiently consider how the social realities of the cross relate to Paul's theology, it nonetheless raises important questions: could a similar reading be provided elsewhere in 2 Corinthians? If there is a social dimension to Paul's argument, how might this change the way interpreters

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<sup>70</sup> Raymond Pickett, *The Cross in Corinth: Social Significance of the Death of Jesus*, LNTS 143 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 31.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 126-208.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

analyze the material generally? Pickett ruminates on the latter, stating, 'There is a sense in which criticisms against [Paul], his reply to these criticisms and his anxiety about the Corinthians' conduct are all interrelated'.<sup>74</sup> But he does not provide any clear statement on how these agendas might work together.

v. *Michael Gorman (2001)*

Gorman's contribution represents further movement in Pickett's direction, albeit without the aid of a particular social method. He considers Paul's theology of the cross in each of his letters, arguing that the apostle presents a 'narrative spirituality of the cross' in which readers become more like Jesus in their suffering—the achievement of 'cruciformity'.<sup>75</sup> In 2 Corinthians, Paul's apology presents a number of virtues exhibited at the cross, such as love and hope, which the Corinthians are to recognize in Paul, who models Christ, and thus adopt these behaviours and attitudes through their own participation with Christ (e.g. 5.15; 12.15).<sup>76</sup>

Much like Pickett, Gorman develops the proposal that 2 Corinthians is more than an apology. But he remains inconsistent in his analysis, continuing to refer to the material as Paul's defense.<sup>77</sup> Although Gorman is laudable for his attempt to describe the significance of Jesus's cross with his term cruciformity—igniting no shortage of interest amongst interpreters<sup>78</sup>—this term focuses upon the cross rather than the resurrection. This contradicts what appears to be the Pauline case for experiences of strength in weakness:

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>75</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 1-8.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 349-67.

<sup>77</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2017), 287, 291.

<sup>78</sup> Not only has Gorman's textbook on Paul gone to a second edition (cited above), his offering entitled *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009) has occasioned no less than fifteen published reviews.

Jesus was *crucified* in weakness, but *lives* by the power of God (2 Cor. 13.5). Gorman's oversight leaves his argument open to the charge of theological sadism. Finally, his insistence that the strength in weakness discourses help individuals in their suffering raises a question from the previous section: is there a specific context of suffering to which Paul is responding in 2 Corinthians?

*vi. Kar Yong Lim (2009)*

The most recent entry in studies of strength in weakness is Lim's, which, like Stegman and Ellington, focuses on the question of participation in 2 Corinthians. A difference, however, is that Lim explicitly engages the question of suffering. He adopts a 'narrative dynamics' approach in which the 'story of Jesus' unites Paul's suffering discourses and gives them meaning.<sup>79</sup> In particular, Paul's suffering aids the 'apostolic mission' by acting as 'a proclamation of the gospel of the crucified Messiah'.<sup>80</sup> This leads Lim to conclude that 2 Corinthians is 'primarily parenaetic in nature' in the sense that it presents a cross-focused ministry that the Corinthians must accept in order to truly embrace their crucified Messiah.<sup>81</sup>

Lim rightly follows in the footsteps of several interpreters by seeing a hortatory function for Paul's suffering discourses. His approach is also distinctive as it helpfully demonstrates that the text itself—without need of a particular social methodology—holds a special interest in the life of the Corinthian community. However, by constantly labelling the data as 'suffering' discourses, he glosses over their unique, paradoxical nature and thus does not truly investigate their theological significance. Instead, he continually relates these suffering discourses to Paul's mission, but in doing so, he keeps the prevailing

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<sup>79</sup> Lim, *Sufferings*, 36.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 198-99.



paradigm intact. Paul's experience of strength in weakness is still largely about his ministry, even if it is indirectly about the Corinthians. In this sense, the fresh direction outlined by Pickett and carried onward by Gorman and Lim appears to have grown somewhat stagnant.

*vii. Changing Focus: Parallel Developments in German Scholarship*

Alongside the above developments in Anglophone scholarship lies a small body of German works that make substantial improvements to our theological understanding of the strength in weakness paradox.<sup>82</sup> The only English work that truly interacts with this field is by O'Collins, who helpfully summarizes the different viewpoints.<sup>83</sup> According to O'Collins, the 'revelatory' view is concerned with the manifestation of a 'previously hidden power' through the transmission of knowledge.<sup>84</sup> This means that weakness possesses a 'hermeneutical function'—it *reveals* power from God that is otherwise unseen.<sup>85</sup> In other words, the Corinthians chastise Paul for his outward weaknesses (e.g. 10.10), but for the apostle, these inadequacies only draw attention to his possession of Christ's strength, which is found in the heart through faith (e.g. 5.12). The 'ontological' view differs by concerning itself with the 'order of reality', in which power increases or even initially becomes available 'in the face of "weakness"'.<sup>86</sup> In a sense, then, weakness is a 'pre-requisite' to experiences of God's power.<sup>87</sup> This suggests that the thrust of the paradox is humility: Paul is humble, and thus receives God's strength (e.g. 12.9b), whereas his opponents' pride prevents it from taking root (e.g. 10.12). A third view is advocated by O'Collins in which

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<sup>82</sup> To be fair, two non-German interpreters are included below: Jan Lambrecht and Victor Nicdao.

<sup>83</sup> Gerald G. O'Collins, 'Power Made Perfect in Weakness, 2 Cor. 12:9-10', *CBQ* 33, no. 4 (October 1971): 528–37.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 528.

<sup>85</sup> Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 454.

<sup>86</sup> O'Collins, 528.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

the views above are combined: 'under circumstances of "weakness" something happens...and others become aware of this new development.'<sup>88</sup>

In what remains of this section, I utilize the categories provided by O'Collins to analyze and classify several key German studies on the strength in weakness paradox.

*viii. Erhardt Güttgemanns (1966)*

A classic work is offered by Güttgemanns, who held that the opponents were Gnostic agitators who doubt Paul's legitimacy due to his lack of ecstatic experiences.<sup>89</sup> Consequently, Paul defends his 'apostolic existence' in 2 Corinthians.<sup>90</sup> Güttgemanns frequently uses the term 'epiphany' to describe the strength in weakness paradox, suggesting that strength *appears* to Paul in the midst of his weaknesses.<sup>91</sup> This leads Güttgemanns to conclude that Paul's boasting in weakness is a language event which represents, not so much a changed lifestyle, but an influx of knowledge that counters the Corinthians' obsession with *gnosis*.<sup>92</sup>

Güttgemanns certainly seems correct to emphasize the issue of knowledge, particularly in light of the opponents' claims (e.g. 10.10), especially if they are Gnostics. This connection between one's characterization of the conflict in Corinth and how one reads the paradox is more evident in Güttgemanns' work than any other work in the field. But this leads to its greatest hurdle: the Gnostic hypothesis has largely been disproven.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Erhardt Güttgemanns, *Der leidende Apostel und sein Herr* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 155-56.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> See e.g. Judith L. Kovacs, 'The Archons, the Spirit, and the Death of Christ: Do We Need the Hypothesis of Gnostic Opponents to Explain 1 Cor. 2.6-16?', in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, ed. Joel Marcus and Marion L. Soards, JSNTSup (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 217-36 and T. E. Klutz, 'Re-Reading 1 Corinthians after Rethinking "Gnosticism"', *JSNT* 26, no. 2 (2003): 193-216.

Can the revelatory view stand unchanged if our understanding of the Corinthian conflict changes? Equally important is Güttgemanns' hesitancy to read the paradox as a transformative event for Paul's life. He suggests that boasting is a language event, but this seems to overlook the wider context of the Fool's Speech, in which Paul draws attention to his experience of power in tangible situations, including shipwrecks, hunger, and imprisonment (e.g. 11.22-33).

*ix. Ulrich Heckel (1993)*

Heckel's study begins with a selective survey of Pauline anthropology in order to frame Paul's strength in weakness discourses in 2 Corinthians 10-13.<sup>94</sup> Like Güttgemanns, he generally takes the revelatory view, even declaring that the ontological view contradicts God's grace by making the reception of power dependent upon human ability and circumstance.<sup>95</sup> Heckel draws attention to the sense in which God's power repeatedly transcends normative evaluations of human worth and competence (e.g. Phil. 4.13; 1 Cor. 1.25).<sup>96</sup> This suggests that the strength in weakness paradox is a '*polar*' and one must ultimately 'dissolve' the paradox: Paul is simply referring to his experience from two different perspectives—that of the human and the divine.<sup>97</sup> In this sense, with knowledge of the divine sphere, Paul understands himself to be simultaneously 'strong' and 'weak' (e.g. 2 Cor. 12.10). But Heckel concedes that there are cases where weakness is necessary for receiving God's power; namely, individuals must repent and confess their sin before they can receive grace (e.g. 13.4b; 12.9b).<sup>98</sup> In this sense, Heckel is ultimately a mixed interpreter.

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<sup>94</sup> Heckel, *Kraft*, 235-88.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-5.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 235-88.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 115-116; 121.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

Heckel is right to highlight the transcendent character of God's power. But the proposal of polar opposition between the divine and the human separates these spheres of existence when Paul seems to emphasize the aid provided by God *in the midst of* his weakness (cf. 12.9). Even more troubling is Heckel's suggestion that the paradox must be dissolved in favour of this conceptual model. Could a different model be proposed that better accounts for the relationship between strength and weakness? Another area of difficulty is Heckel's disdain for the ontological view, which is followed by his concession that one sometimes admits weakness to receive God's strength. Heckel renders the revelatory and ontological views co-existent, but it is somewhat unclear how these dimensions of the paradox truly complement one another. Furthermore, Heckel often leaves one wondering what a paradoxical experience achieves *anthropologically* beyond the imparting of heavenly knowledge that enables Paul to defend himself.

*x. Gerhard Hotze (1997)*

Hotze insists that the Lord's power is too transcendent to 'express concretely', so it is received by faith in the 'inner person'.<sup>99</sup> This leads Hotze to argue that the concrete attitudes referred to in 2 Cor. 12.9-10, such as boasting and contentment, are concessive and purely meant to prevent the paradox from becoming incomprehensible.<sup>100</sup> His view of the paradox is, like Heckel's, concerned with the knowledge needed to understand two tiers of existence: the human and the divine.<sup>101</sup> He maintains that this is the *only* way to comprehend the paradox.<sup>102</sup>

With respect to 2 Corinthians, Hotze's work is largely derivative of Heckel's. But Hotze presents a stronger dichotomy between the human and the divine, going so far as to

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<sup>99</sup> Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 219-20.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

suggest that this transcendent paradox is hardly captured by human actions. This is difficult to accept given that Paul's theology often works inside out, moving from an inward renewal to changed attitudes and behaviours (e.g. Rom 12.1-2). Is there more of a connection between knowledge and behaviour than Hotze envisions? And how would this work paradoxically? Might Hotze's earthly/heavenly dichotomy actually be false?

*xi. Victor Nicdao (1997)*

Nicdao's work represents the only comprehensive engagement of this sub-field in the English language. His research is focused on the 'relationship' between strength and weakness, which leads to a survey of sources that includes the German interpreters above.<sup>103</sup> He offers the general conclusion that both the revelatory and ontological views are necessary and they should be judged as complementary rather than opposed.<sup>104</sup>

Despite the unique nature of Nicdao's study, he is very brief with his critical analysis and provides little advance in knowledge other than to bring some scholarship into the English language and to summarize the history of research in a deeply comprehensive way. Nicdao's thesis is a valuable reference work, but like Black above, it is limited in its utility.

*xii. Jan Lambrecht (2001)*

Lambrecht begins with the premise that 'a paradox should not be understood literally.'<sup>105</sup> He then argues that because strength in weakness is a component of Paul's everyday life (i.e. 12.7), it involves the coming of real power as opposed to its mere

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<sup>103</sup> Victor S. Nicdao, 'Power in Times of Weakness According to 2 Corinthians 12, 1-10: An Exegetical Investigation of the Relationship between Δύναμις and Ἀσθένεια' (Ph.D. Thesis, KU Leuven, 1997), 683-786.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 853-54.

<sup>105</sup> Jan Lambrecht, 'Paulus Vermag Alles Door de Kracht van God. Zwakheid En Sterkte', *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 55, no. 4 (2001): 273-85 [274]. The Dutch reads: 'aen paradox mag men niet letterlijk verstaan'.

appearance (e.g. 4.16; 6.1-10).<sup>106</sup> In this sense, Lambrecht represents the ontological view, which is re-inforced in 13.4, where he suggests that Paul presents himself as weak in order to receive strength—much like the timeline of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.<sup>107</sup>

Lambrecht rightly draws attention to the Christological basis of the paradox. However, it is difficult to follow his argument when he does not justify his premise that a paradox cannot be understood literally. The paradox may be hard to understand, but Lambrecht seems to have used this reality—consciously or unconsciously—to justify a reading of strength in weakness that depends heavily on 13.4-5 rather than 12.9-10. Furthermore, the emphasis on prevenient human weakness creates the possibility of a new kind of competitiveness in Corinth—instead of a race to the top, it becomes a race to the bottom! Is the ontological view sufficiently sensitive to the situation in Corinth?

### *xiii. Trends in the Study of Strength in Weakness*

Following the above survey, it appears that several trends noted in the study of 2 Corinthians remain true for analyses devoted to the strength in weakness theme. A variety of studies do not engage seriously with the paradox and remain totally within the prevailing paradigm. This is brought to a climax in Savage's work, where the Pauline ministry is of only hypothetical relevance to the Corinthians given Paul's self-referential exposition and what is effectively the secondary benefit of delivering a rebuke to the community. The tide begins to turn with the contributions of Pickett, Gorman, and Lim, who tend in the direction of Ellington and Stegman, as each re-thinks some of the material and envisions a hortatory function for Paul's suffering discourses. The irony is that they do not seriously engage the logic or theological significance of the paradox. These

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 281-82.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 284.

contributions also struggle—like those earlier—to remain consistent and they fail to question the paradigm despite raising relevant implications. Most importantly, none revisits the setting preceding 2 Corinthians to consider whether the apologetic paradigm has led to a selective reading of the evidence. This fact is all the more surprising given that Paul identifies the pastoral context of the community's pain (2.1-7; 7.5-16). As mentioned above, this is the immediate context of much, or all, of the material,<sup>108</sup> yet as Gorman and Lim insist that Paul's experience of strength in weakness instructs the community on suffering, they do not comment on the Corinthians' experience of pain and suffering (e.g. 1.6-7; 2.1-7). This leaves a gap in our understanding of the relationship between the Corinthian situation and Paul's experience of strength in weakness.

German scholarship on strength in weakness has a different tendency: it offers a more sustained engagement with the theological significance of the paradox, yet this is almost to the exclusion of broader concerns within 2 Corinthians. Their studies of paradox argue for very specific functions related to the attainment of knowledge (the revelatory view) or the necessity of humility (the ontological view). But they do not follow English scholarship in questioning the apologetic paradigm and, even worse, both Hotze and Lambrecht choose—as a matter of first principle—to ignore the paradoxical structure of Paul's argument. This is perhaps the greatest sign of trouble within the field as the very object of study has become a haunted spectre, from which interpreters must flee! It is worth noting that all of the scholars above, especially Hotze and Savage, adhere to the apologetic reading of the background to 2 Corinthians, where the opponents are emphasized and Paul's response is a defense.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> See esp. sec. I-II of Ch. 2 for consideration of this claim with reference to partition theories.

<sup>109</sup> E.g. Güttgemanns, *Herr*, 155-56; Heckel, *Kraft*, 2; Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 252-54, 178; Lambrecht, 'Sterkte', 276-78.

These observations lead to the initial diagnosis that there is linguistic fragmentation in studies of strength in weakness: Anglophone scholarship focuses upon the broader significance of the paradox while German studies are interested in its theological details. These emphases are complementary, and it is altogether surprising that these two bodies of literature have never cross-pollinated. An improved understanding of the paradox could help the overall view of the material in 2 Corinthians, and the latter could improve the former by focusing the paradox on its most pressing questions. Alongside this is the even deeper problem that, in the modern era, there has yet to be a serious reading of the strength in weakness paradox that begins with the setting of 2 Corinthians and, during the course of argument, relates its findings to issues concerning the apologetic paradigm. It is in this context that Plummer's confusion makes a great deal of sense: 'Over and over again the Apostle seems to be alluding to something which his readers can understand; but we are not always certain that there is any allusion, and we can rarely be certain what the allusion is.'<sup>110</sup> More than a misunderstanding of Pauline allusion, the field of 2 Corinthians finds itself in a position where the theological core of Paul's response lies unscrutinized vis-à-vis the apostle's larger purpose. In this sense, the field lies in crisis. The literature contains only constrained answers to the question: how does Paul build up the Corinthians using his strength in weakness argument (cf. 2 Cor. 12.19)? He may defend himself, even identify heavenly knowledge, but the possibility that Paul aids the Corinthians *in their weakness* is left unconsidered. This study consequently offers a fresh reading of strength in weakness, especially in relation to the Corinthian context of pain (e.g. 2.1-7; 7.5-16).

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<sup>110</sup> Plummer, *Corinthians*, xiii.



#### IV. Research Approach, Outline, and Aims

Given the nature of the analysis above—especially its interest in the life of the community and Paul's vocation as a minister of Christ—one might suggest that my approach bears resemblances to 'Paul as pastor' literature.<sup>111</sup> While I share some interests with this emerging field, my argument is not driven by a vocational agenda. Instead, like most interpreters, I maintain that the conflict between Paul and Corinth is of special importance. A point of departure lies in my insistence that this conflict places the whole community in the spotlight. Building upon the work of Ellington and Stegman, I consider whether Paul, though he speaks so often of himself, is presenting his experience of strength in weakness as a *paradigm* for how the Corinthians can be transformed in their experience of pain. This proposal is not unlike Rancière's concept of 'subjectivization', which insists that communication is an 'in-between dialect' created for a particular discussion.<sup>112</sup> Even if the speaker interacts indirectly with the audience, they are able—by virtue of having access to the discussion—to render a 'translation' and consider its personal applicability.<sup>113</sup>

In practical terms, this means that it would be inadvisable, even pre-judging the material, to begin reading 2 Corinthians with the assumption that Paul's autobiographical discourses are largely about his ministry or that there is a special faction in Corinth who receive the majority of Paul's attention. The material is, in its present form, addressed generally to 'the church of God that is at Corinth' (1.1). So this study will focus on the broad implications of Paul's remarks for the Corinthians. It bears repeating that 'every

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<sup>111</sup> See e.g. James W. Thompson, *Pastoral Ministry according to Paul: A Biblical Vision* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006); Michael P. Knowles, *We Preach Not Ourselves: Paul on Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008); Rosner et al., *Paul as Pastor*, 55–70.

<sup>112</sup> Jacques Rancière, 'Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization', *October* 61 (1992): 58–64 [58].

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* Within Pauline Studies, a similar approach is advocated by Lyons, *Autobiography*, 124–224.

Pauline letter arose, at least in part, from pastoral needs.<sup>114</sup> Whether or not the needs of the Corinthians went beyond a defense of the apostleship is an open question, but this study nonetheless insists that the material be viewed with the whole community as its subject.

The consequence of my focus is that certain issues lie beyond the scope of this study. This includes questions about the opponents' identity which, although they will be addressed later,<sup>115</sup> must be examined more with a view to determining the opponents' *influence* on the Paul-Corinth relationship than their precise *identity*. Issues of rhetoric that focus more on abstract guidelines for communication than the personal relationship with Corinth will not be rehearsed.<sup>116</sup> Also lying beyond this study is the conversation on Paul's use of the plural pronoun, which has yet to alter the conclusion that Paul is the chief author of 2 Corinthians.<sup>117</sup> The goal here is to reduce distractions from the possibility that the Corinthians are transformed by hearing of Paul's experiences; that is, what Rancière calls 'the formation of a one that is not a self but is the relation of a self to an other.'<sup>118</sup>

This study will begin to qualify the relationship between Paul and Corinth by considering the nature of the situation being addressed in 2 Corinthians, especially the pain (λύπη) created by Paul's previous visit and letter (2.1-7; 7.5-16). I start here because, as noted above, this is a widely overlooked dimension of the Corinthian conflict which forms a promising line of enquiry for considering the relevance of Paul's strength in weakness argument to Corinth. I will engage in a semantic survey of λυπ- words in sources roughly contemporary with Paul, including Philo, Josephus, and Plutarch. The semantic potential of λυπ- words will then be considered in light of Paul's usage of these terms in 2 Corinthians 2.1-7; 7.5-16 in order to determine which meanings are most applicable. All of this is in

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<sup>114</sup> Harris, *Corinthians*, 1.

<sup>115</sup> See sec. II.ii of Ch. 5.

<sup>116</sup> See fnt. 31-32 above.

<sup>117</sup> See the excellent overview in Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:105-7.

<sup>118</sup> Rancière, 'Subjectivization', 60.

service of a broader question: are interpreters correct to assume that the Corinthians' pain in 2.1-7 is identical with the godly grief of 7.5-16 and has thus quickly faded? I argue that this assumption is unjustified given that the community appears to be experiencing ongoing despair, heartbreak, and bitterness toward Paul. The implications of this conclusion will first be considered with respect to characterizations of the community. The Corinthians are typically portrayed as strong rebels, but is there now a sense in which they are weak, wounded believers? Since the nature of the Corinthian conflict affects how literary partitions are organized, the implications for the integrity debate will be considered. Finally, this chapter will address Paul's ἰσθεν- language, which forms the backbone of the strength in weakness paradox in 2 Corinthians 10-13. I will consider the potential for semantic and theological connections between this word group and the Corinthians' pains.

The main body of research is an exegetical analysis of selected passages in 2 Corinthians. Each text was chosen because it employs the basic language and theology that forms the strength in weakness paradox—God's power arrives amidst Paul's weakness. The main texts are evenly distributed across the material (1.3-11; 4.7-15; 6.3-13; 7.5-16; 12.1-21), thus providing a representative sample of the strength in weakness argument. The analysis of the paradox begins in 1.3-11, where I will consider the nature of the programmatic thanksgiving (v. 3-7), its connection with Paul's affliction in Asia (v. 8-11), and Paul's intent for 2 Corinthians. Moving to 4.7-15, I consider the nature of the 'treasure in jars of clay' metaphor, particularly its logical structure and whether it is appropriate to describe the paradox as a contrast between divine power and human weakness. In the following chapter, I explore the suffering catalogue of 6.3-10. A special focus will be the connection between these autobiographical verses and the command that the Corinthians

'widen' their 'hearts' to Paul (v. 13). Is there some sense in which the paradox enables the Corinthians to reconcile with Paul? My argument culminates with 12.1-10 where, upon incorporating the insights of German scholarship, I offer a new view on the strength in weakness paradox. The guiding question here concerns the intricate relationship between divine and human agency—in what sense, if any, does the paradox initiate personal transformation in the life of Paul and the Corinthians? My exegetical analysis concludes with 12.11-21 and 13.1-5, where I suggest that the paradox's pragmatic effects are not fully understood until one analyzes these overlooked passages. Finally, I conclude by considering how the results of my study should influence the general synopsis of the material contained in 2 Corinthians.

Above all, I argue that Paul is *not* focused on defending himself in 2 Corinthians (though he does this from time to time); rather, he writes to the Corinthians in the midst of their pains to build them up with his strength in weakness discourses. His argument is so deeply pastoral that it is insufficient to classify it merely as a defense or an exposition of the apostleship. Paul's experience is a paradigm in which the community learns how Christ helps them in *their* weakness, enacting a series of transformative trajectories that modifies their emotions and behaviour, not least their ability to reconcile with Paul. In other words, the strength in weakness paradox possesses a broadly *transformative* function which incorporates aspects of the ontological and revelatory viewpoints. Rather than follow the field by concluding that divine power *displaces* human weakness in the paradox, I argue that Christ's power *redeems* weakness without abolishing it, and together, these two realities paradoxically increase human potential for living like Christ amidst relational conflict. In this sense, rather than denigrating theological paradox, I conclude that it is a

useful category for speaking into a community that believes weakness is totally opposed to strength.

Beker once said that Paul's letters are 'a word on target, in the midst of human, contingent specificity.'<sup>119</sup> This project re-considers the nature of that specificity in Corinth, and in doing so, offers the chance to learn anew how Paul unpacks his gospel as a 'word on target' for the Corinthians. It is expected that the study will make original contributions to our understanding of the situation preceding 2 Corinthians, especially the character of the Corinthians' pain; the literary integrity problem; the connection between pain (λύπη) and strength in weakness; the theological significance of the strength in weakness paradox and its connection to communal behaviours; as well as the broader purpose of 2 Corinthians. It may even challenge the prevailing apologetic paradigm, which is not a glass ceiling to be shattered and destroyed; instead, it is a barrier that needs to be cut open and re-oriented to produce a view of the atmosphere that lies above. Paul defends himself in 2 Corinthians, but as I will demonstrate, he does so less than many suppose and with the overlooked goal of fortifying his ministry *so that* he can usher the community into a higher atmosphere that gives them more than a new relationship with their apostle. In this thin space, where—one might say—heaven and earth collide, one learns what happens when the Corinthians come face-to-face with a paradox which descends in the God-man, Jesus Christ (cf. 13.4).

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<sup>119</sup> Johan Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 24.

## Chapter 2

### The Problem of Pain: Re-characterizing the Corinthian Situation Through Paul's Use of Λύπ- Words

#### I. Introduction

The conflict between Paul and his community in 2 Corinthians is typically portrayed as 'explosive' and 'incendiary'<sup>120</sup> given that the apostle appears engaged in an *apologia* for '[his] person and for his apostolic ministry'.<sup>121</sup> As discussed previously, although there are signs that the community needs comfort—they experienced pain (λύπη) due to Paul's previous visit and letter (2.1-7)—most interpreters *assume* that the Corinthians' emotive struggle is identical to their 'godly grief [κατὰ θεὸν λύπη]' (7.5-16).<sup>122</sup> This emotion<sup>123</sup> endured 'only for a while [εἰ καὶ πρὸς ὥραν]' (v. 7) and created 'repentance [μετάνοια]' (v. 9), thus suggesting that the community's pain had ceased. But is this conclusion justified? The question is significant given that the consensus on the community's pain enables the apologetic reading of 2 Corinthians. Interpreters do not typically portray the Corinthians as a humbled or hurting party; rather, they are rebellious converts who believe they are 'strong' enough to distinguish themselves from Paul (e.g.

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<sup>120</sup> Roetzel, *Corinthians*, 13.

<sup>121</sup> Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 49.

<sup>122</sup> See e.g. Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:490; Colin G. Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, TNTC (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 131; Harvey, *Renewal*, 43-4; Schmeller, *Korinther*, I:15; Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 376; Harris, *Corinthians*, 535.

<sup>123</sup> Following Stephen C. Barton, 'Eschatology and the Emotions in Early Christianity', *JBL* 130, no. 3 (September 2011): 571–91 [573-74], I am not using the term 'emotion' to distinguish it in any significant way from 'passions' in antiquity. I am simply utilizing a common term to refer to the affective, experiential dimension of human life. I adopt Rosaldo's seminal definition of emotion: '[W]hat distinguishes thought and affect, differentiating a "cold" cognition from a "hot," is fundamentally a sense of the engagement of the actor's self. Emotions are thoughts somehow "felt" in flushes, pulses, "movements" of our livers, minds, hearts, stomachs, and skins. They are *embodied* thoughts' (Michelle Rosaldo, "Towards an Anthropology of Self and Feeling," in *Cultural Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 137–57 [137-38].). For more on Paul's cognitive understanding of emotion, see p. 74-75 below.

13.9; 10.10).<sup>124</sup> Consequently, Paul's apparently apologetic approach coheres with the situation. He is dismissive with a community that is drafting his dismissal! In this chapter, however, I consider whether there is evidence to contradict the assumption that the Corinthians' godly grief signals the end of the pain created by Paul's previous visit and letter. The intent is to produce implications concerning the Corinthian situation which challenge the prevailing research paradigm.

Before a full description of my hypothesis can be provided, one has to consider certain key details relating to the pain in Corinth and its place in ongoing research. It is widely held that an individual associated with the community offends Paul's authority during, or immediately preceding, his second visit to Corinth (2.1-2).<sup>125</sup> The precise act which created offence is unclear.<sup>126</sup> But the apostle responded with a 'painful' letter (2.3) and this led to an emotive crisis for Paul and the community (2.1-7; 7.5-16). One's reading of this conflict is sometimes dependent upon one's conclusions concerning the material's literary integrity. But I am not adopting a position on this issue for the time being.<sup>127</sup> This is because most, if not all, of the major theories reach the same conclusions regarding the community's pain: it began prior to the material constituting 2 Corinthians, and it quickly ceased either before the letter was written or before the final reconciliatory letter was produced (1.1-2.13; 7.5-16).

Those who read 2 Corinthians as a unity possess the most straightforward scenario—Paul sends a painful letter, but the community's pain ceases by the time he

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<sup>124</sup> See sec. I of Ch. 1.

<sup>125</sup> With the vast majority of modern commentators, I assume that Paul's second visit to Corinth is his 'painful' visit (cf. 2 Cor. 13.1). This question is not significant for my argument, but see the recent discussion in Stephen C. Carlson, 'On Paul's Second Visit to Corinth: Πάλιν, Parsing, and Presupposition in 2 Corinthians 2:1', *JBL* 135, no. 3 (2016): 597–615 [597-602].

<sup>126</sup> I assume only what is common to prevailing views: the offender (whether an insider or outsider) is associated with the community and he commits an offence against Paul's authority. For some significant reconstructions, see p. 4, fnt. 16 above.

<sup>127</sup> The literary integrity issue is discussed more on p. 76-83 below.

writes 2 Corinthians (e.g. 7.5-16).<sup>128</sup> If the painful letter is identified as 2 Corinthians 10-13,<sup>129</sup> the pain still begins prior to the material constituting 2 Corinthians not least because the painful visit (2.1) *precedes* the painful letter (2.3).<sup>130</sup> This is also true if one suggests that 2.14-6.13, 7.2-4 was originally attached to chs. 10-13, while 1.1-2.13; 7.5-16 is a final reconciliatory missive.<sup>131</sup> Even if one adopts the minority position that 2.14-6.13, 7.2-4 was a subtle apologetic originating before the painful visit and letter, one can read this document in light of the community's pain because many of the hostile conditions that gave rise to it are already in place.<sup>132</sup> Schmithals suggests that this apology was sent so close to the painful visit that the apostle and the community may have already experienced λύπη.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, each of these scenarios asserts that the conflict was essentially resolved by the time of the reconciliatory letter (1.1-2.13; 7.5-16), thus they give little attention to the nature of the Corinthians' pain.<sup>134</sup> This leads to the focus of my analysis: not so much how the pain began, but when it did or did not cease. If the pain is found to be unresolved, each of the above theories would be affected. This is especially so if one believes the conflict concludes with a reconciliatory missive. Instead, it would be a far more complex, festering struggle.

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<sup>128</sup> See e.g. Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 308-11 and Harris, *Corinthians*, 42-51, 221-22.

<sup>129</sup> See e.g. Francis Watson, '2 Cor. X-XIII and Paul's Painful Letter to the Corinthians', *JTS* 35, no. 2 (1984): 324-46 [345-46] and Laurence L. Welborn, 'The Identification of 2 Corinthians 10-13 with the "Letter of Tears"', *NovT* 37, no. 2 (April 1995): 138-53 [152].

<sup>130</sup> This is a nearly unanimous conclusion based upon the sequence of Paul's report in 2.1-4. See the excellent overview of this position in Vegge, *Reconciliation*, 10-11.

<sup>131</sup> See e.g. Johannes Weiss, *Earliest Christianity: A History of the Period A.D. 30-150*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 348 and Rudolf Bultmann, 'Exegetische Probleme Des Zweiten Korintherbriefes', in *Exegetica: Aufsätze zur Erforschung des Neuen Testaments*, ed. Erich Dinkler (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1967), 298-322.

<sup>132</sup> See e.g. Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul, the Corinthians and the Birth of Christian Hermeneutics* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 7; Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians* (London: Abingdon Press, 1971), 92-7; Bornkamm, 'Corinthians', 259-60.

<sup>133</sup> Schmithals, *Gnosticism*, 102-04. Also see Bornkamm, 'Corinthians', 260.

<sup>134</sup> See e.g. *Ibid.*, 96-100; Weiss, *Earliest*, 348-353; Watson, 'Painful', 340. I do not address partition theories that treat 2 Corinthians 8-9 because they are typically taken as later, independent letters and thus have little impact on my argument.



Despite the potential ramifications of λυπ- words in 2 Corinthians, there remains a dearth of interest in the Corinthians' pain even within the expanding literature on the emotions in Paul's life and letters.<sup>135</sup> Welborn laments that 'virtually no exposition of λύπη is to be found in the commentaries, nor does λύπη appear among the list of *'traits précis'* which are taken to clarify the problem of the offender and offence'.<sup>136</sup> The earliest recognition that the community's pain is significant for interpretation likely comes from Ambrosiaster's commentary.<sup>137</sup> In the modern era, scholars such as Allo and Windisch have noted its importance.<sup>138</sup> Thrall even remarks, 'Since [Paul's previous letter] was obviously highly critical of their behaviour it could have provoked...the kind of psychological pain that would turn into aversion towards Paul'.<sup>139</sup> Unfortunately, Thrall does not develop this insight, which serves as a reminder that interpreters have generally failed to give more than a passing thought to the emotional state of the community. Even if their pain has ceased, the conditions in which negative emotion flourishes—that of conflict—have not entirely dissipated in the relationship between Paul and Corinth (e.g. 1.6, 19-22).<sup>140</sup> So it is likely that the community would have at least been experiencing an emotional hangover that required a response. The emotions, especially negative emotions, cannot be dealt with so

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<sup>135</sup> A helpful survey is found in David Charles Aune, 'Passions in the Pauline Epistles: The Current State of Research', in *Passions and Moral Progress in Greco-Roman Thought*, ed. John T. Fitzgerald (Routledge, 2008), 221–37. Other works include Barton, 'Emotions', 571–91; Stephen Voorwinde, 'Paul's Emotions in Acts', *The Reformed Theological Review* 73, no. 2 (August 2014): 75–100; Yun Shern Ian Jew, 'Paul's Emotional Regime: The Social Function of Emotion in Philippians and 1 Thessalonians' (PhD. diss., Durham University, 2017).

<sup>136</sup> Welborn, *Enmity*, 44. It is notable that there is not a single essay or subsection devoted to λυπ- words in Reimund Bieringer et al., eds., *Theologizing in the Corinthian Conflict: Studies in Exegesis and Theology of 2 Corinthians*, BTS 16 (Leuven: Peeters, 2013).

<sup>137</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentaries on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians*, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 189; 303.

<sup>138</sup> E.B. Allo, *Seconde Épitre Aux Corinthiens*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Études Bibliques, 1956), 59 and Hans Windisch, *Der Zweite Korintherbrief*, (KEK, 1/9; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1924), 84.

<sup>139</sup> Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:492-93.

<sup>140</sup> See p. 45-49 below.

swiftly: 'It is impossible to close your eyes, grit your teeth and say, "I will now have joy" and as a result feel joyful'.<sup>141</sup>

The exception to the lack of inquisitiveness outlined above is the work of Welborn. He gives prominence to the λυπ- word group by arguing that 2 Corinthians 1.1-2.13; 7.5-16 represents a 'therapeutic epistle' wherein Paul utilizes ancient psychagogy to address a variety of emotions within the community (including λύπη).<sup>142</sup> In *An End to Enmity*, Welborn argues for an expansive understanding of the λυπ- word group, believing that these terms can refer to 'distress, anxiety, sorrow or grief, bordering upon the modern concept of depression, but also frustration and annoyance, especially at insults'.<sup>143</sup> He highlights how λυπ- words were often employed to describe intimate yet asymmetrical relationships wherein the inferior party becomes pained.<sup>144</sup> This aids in reconstructing the relationship between the offender and Paul, revealing that the offender was likely Gaius—the host of the community (cf. Rom. 16.23).<sup>145</sup> So it is not surprising that Welborn elsewhere concludes, '2 Corinthians was occasioned...by the 'grief' with which the Corinthians responded to Paul's painful epistle'.<sup>146</sup>

The keen insights of Welborn's work notwithstanding, it is significant that he never considers whether the Corinthians' pain in 2.1-7 is identical with the godly grief of 7.5-16. In fact, Welborn seems to believe that the Corinthians' pain is ongoing, but he does not directly engage the consensus that it had ceased. He is also very non-specific about the nature of the Corinthians' pain. He tends to identify the *semantic potential* of λυπ- words

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<sup>141</sup> Matthew Elliot, *Faithful Feelings: Emotion in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 2005), 38. This is true for both ancient and modern theories of the emotions: see esp. Barton, 'Emotions', 576-78, 588.

<sup>142</sup> Welborn, 'Paul and Pain', 547.

<sup>143</sup> Welborn, *Enmity*, 44. See p. 40-45 below for more on the semantic potential of λυπ- words.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 44-50.

<sup>146</sup> Welborn, 'Emotions', 59.

without considering which meanings are present in Paul's usage.<sup>147</sup> Perhaps most importantly, Welborn fails to consider the broader implications of his argument for the situation in Corinth and Paul's purpose. This raises a key question: if it is shown that the Corinthians' pain is ongoing, how might this alter our view of the community's situation and the nature of Paul's response?

In the following analysis, I offer a study of  $\lambda\upsilon\pi$ - words (noun, verb, and adjective) in ancient literature. Once I have established their semantic potential, I investigate which meanings are actually communicated by the occurrences of this word group in 2 Corinthians (i.e. 2.1-7; 7.5-16). I argue that Paul uses  $\lambda\upsilon\pi$ - words to signify three pains present in the community: despair, heartbreak, and bitterness. These pains are distinct from the 'godly grief' that lasted 'only for a while' (7.8)—what I establish as a limited sense of remorse—thus suggesting that the community is experiencing pains as Paul pens each part of 2 Corinthians.

## II. An Analysis of $\lambda\upsilon\pi$ - Words

### *i. Methodology*

In considering how to determine the meaning of  $\lambda\upsilon\pi$ - words in 2 Corinthians, one might suggest that it is inappropriate, for instance, to consult Stoic sources given that they utilize this word group to describe one of the four negative passions—desire, fear, pleasure, and *pain* ( $\lambdaύπη$ )<sup>148</sup>—and thus invest it with unique philosophical significance. However, this overlooks my first task, which is identifying the semantic *potential* of  $\lambda\upsilon\pi$ -

<sup>147</sup> See e.g. Welborn, *Enmity*, 44-51 and Welborn, 'Paul and Pain', 548.

<sup>148</sup> See e.g. Tad Brennan, 'Stoic Moral Psychology' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 256 - 294 [270-71] and Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 29-30. For this sort of use in classical sources see David Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 244-58.

words. It may be true that Paul does not use λύπη in the Stoics' technical sense, but he may be using it in a non-technical sense. The best way to determine what Paul expresses with λυπ- words is to begin collecting possible meanings from his context, including Stoic sources.<sup>149</sup> To do otherwise risks falling prey to the *lexical fallacy*: the belief that words primarily obtain their meaning through a lexeme; in other words, an 'overemphasis on words to the detriment of context'.<sup>150</sup> In fact, Morgan argues that New Testament authors 'must be read as products of their complex sociocultural context as much as contributors to it'.<sup>151</sup> To do otherwise is to violate 'a basic principle of cultural historiography' that 'new communities forming themselves within an existing culture do not typically take language in common use in the world and immediately assign to it radical new meanings'.<sup>152</sup> This is crucial because Paul's audience was located in comopolitan Corinth, they were largely Gentiles (1 Cor. 6.9-11; 8.7; 12.2) and they certainly were not a mature community (3.2; 5.1-2; 14.20, 23-5; 2 Cor. 10.12; 11.4). Of course, Paul's use of λυπ- words may be distinctive, but this distinctiveness will always develop through interactions with his context. So it is good historical practice to suggest that Paul's view of λυπ- words must be contextualized through the wide lens of antiquity.<sup>153</sup>

In particular, I will consider both philosophical and historical texts in an effort to provide a wide, representative sample of λυπ- words. But to ensure that I survey meanings

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<sup>149</sup> See e.g. James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 218 and Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 64.

<sup>150</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (InterVarsity Press, 2010), 84.

<sup>151</sup> Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 4. Morgan offers a comprehensive study of 'faith' in the New Testament and the broader Greco-Roman world, see p. 36-261.

<sup>153</sup> Even if my use of the Stoics implies acceptance of their technical meaning—λύπη is a negative pain concerning a judgment about the present—it seems unlikely that Paul would reject this despite other differences, such as how one evaluates or responds to pain. See e.g. Brennan, 'Psychology', 270 and John M.G. Barclay, "'That you may not grieve, like the rest who have no hope': Death and Early Christian Identity' in *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2016), 217-236 [esp. 231-234].

native to the Corinthian conflict, my analysis gives particular attention to λυπ- words related to *relational conflict* in the LXX and sources contemporary with Paul, such as Philo, Josephus, and Plutarch.<sup>154</sup> Although the LXX considerably pre-dates Paul, it receives an exception because it is so often quoted by him and it clearly influences his terminology (e.g. 2 Cor. 1.4; 3.7-11; 4.6; 4.13).<sup>155</sup>

## ii. A Survey of Ancient Sources

Given the consensus that λυπ- words in 2 Corinthians represent only one kind of pain, one might expect a monolithic array of potential meaning. But this expectation is disabused by a variety of sources. Beginning with Plato and Aristotle, the word group possesses a wide range of meaning.<sup>156</sup> For example, Aristotle defines 'envy [φθόνος]' as 'a certain kind of distress [λύπη] at apparent success on the part of one's peers in attaining...good things.'<sup>157</sup> Frede comments that Aristotle's view of λύπη 'reaches from the simple sensation of the pain of a mosquito-bite to the feeling of disgust at some cruelty, or the *ennui* of having to listen to a boring lecture.'<sup>158</sup> Although classical sources regularly use these terms to refer to physical pain, the usage grows more psychological as one enters the first century CE. Strabo employs λυπ- words to signify inward despair and the pain of economic disaster.<sup>159</sup> Dio Chrysostom likewise uses λύπη to refer to general sadness or

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<sup>154</sup> To be fair, Philo and Plutarch are *roughly* contemporary with Paul (i.e. a few decades before and after, respectively). I am nonetheless comfortable with these sources given that λυπ- words were commonly (though not overly) used in antiquity, meaning their semantic base was established and not easily altered. This coheres with the approach of e.g. Turner and Cotterell, *Linguistics*, 134-135 and Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1994), 144-45.

<sup>155</sup> For more on the influence of the LXX in 2 Corinthians, see Paul Han, *Swimming in the Sea of Scripture: Paul's Use of the Old Testament in 2 Corinthians 4:7-13:13*, LNTS 519 (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1-15.

<sup>156</sup> Plat. *Phileb.* 21e, 32b, 44b; *Laws* 634a; Aristot. *Nic. Eth.* 1104b, 1148a. These terms were also common in classical playwrights: Soph. *Elec.* 1.58, *Rex.* 74, *Aj.* 275; Eur. *Med.* 195, 286, *Hipp.* 1105.

<sup>157</sup> Arist. *Rhet.* 2.10.1. See also: *Nic. Eth.* 1008b.

<sup>158</sup> Dorothea Frede in 'Pleasure and Pain in Aristotle's Ethics' in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 258.

<sup>159</sup> *Geogr.* 15.1.65; 11.2.19; 4.6.7

bereavement.<sup>160</sup> It was not uncommon for philosophers, especially Stoics, to use a λυπ- word as a *portmanteau* term with specific instantiations.<sup>161</sup> In his *On the Passions*, Andronicus refers to dozens of 'parts [εἶδη]' within λύπη such as zeal (ζῆλος), jealousy (ζηλοτυπία), and distraction (σύγχυσις).<sup>162</sup> Some 'parts' are repeated elsewhere and others are not: Andronicus totals twenty-five types of λύπη whereas Arius Didymus lists nine and Diogenes Laertius lists ten.<sup>163</sup> Diogenes is the most descriptive, specifying that 'pity [ἔλεος] is pain [λύπη] felt at undeserved suffering' and 'jealousy [ζηλοτυπία], pain [λύπη] at the possession by another of what one has oneself'.<sup>164</sup>

Within the LXX one finds that λυπ- words can refer to a variety of pains ranging from the physical effects of childbirth to the inward sorrow caused by a disobedient child (e.g. Gen. 3.16; Tob. 9.4).<sup>165</sup> The word group is used frequently in Sirach and Tobit, where it most commonly refers to inward pain. This includes social rejection and betrayal: 'Is it not a pain [λύπη] like that for death itself when a dear friend turns into an enemy?' (Sir. 37.2).<sup>166</sup> Sirach also uses λυπ- words to refer to irritation (12.9) and general sadness/despair (26.28; 30.21; 38.17). These terms can even signal a deep despair that borders upon depression: 'Remove pain [λύπη] far from you, for it has destroyed many, and no advantage ever comes from it' (30.23). An especially poignant use suggests humiliation: 'A sensible daughter obtains a husband of her own, but one who acts shamefully is a pain [λύπη] to her father' (22.4, also 18.14). This meaning is also found in Tobit, where, upon

<sup>160</sup> This is the most common use in *Orationes*. See 1.34; 4.78; 6.40-41; 9.12; 10.15; esp. 16.1-11.

<sup>161</sup> See the discussion in e.g. Brennan, 'Psychology', 270-271 and Andrew Erskine, 'Cicero and the Expression of Grief' in *The Passions in Roman Thought and Literature*, eds. Susanna Morton Braund and Christopher Gill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 36-47 [40-41].

<sup>162</sup> SVF 3.414.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid; Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.92; Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* 7.111.

<sup>164</sup> *Vitae philosophorum*, 7.111-112. Notably, Stobaeus, *Ecl.* 2.92 includes φόβος as a species of λύπη.

<sup>165</sup> Neither λύπη nor λυπέω is consistently used in the LXX for any particular Hebrew lexeme, although they most commonly translate the צָעַר stem. For more information, see *TDNT*, 317.

<sup>166</sup> See also Sir. 30.5.

being berated with insults regarding the death of her husbands, Sarah was 'pained [λυπέω] in spirit and wept' (3.10). In the same chapter, Tobit uses λυπέω to refer to remorse for sin: 'Then with much grief [λυπέω] and anguish of heart I wept, and with groaning began to pray: "You are righteous, O Lord, and all your deeds are just....Do not punish me for my sins and unwitting offenses"' (3.1-3).<sup>167</sup>

Philo occasionally uses φόβος and φοβέω in connection with λυπ- words: 'Pain [λύπη] and fear [φόβος] are like bites or stings telling the soul to treat nothing carelessly'.<sup>168</sup> But he is most distinctive when he contrasts λύπη on multiple occasions with χαρά ('joy') and its cognates to mean sadness or despair. For instance, he says, 'But let no one suppose that joy [χαρά] descends from heaven to earth pure and free from any kind of pain [λύπη]'.<sup>169</sup> He elsewhere describes a situation in which one takes 'pain [λύπη] at our neighbour's good things' to the point that it prevents us from exercising due kindness.<sup>170</sup> While this may describe bitterness, Philo also communicates relational heartbreak in his recollection of the near sacrifice of Isaac. He states, 'For a father to surrender one of a numerous family as a tithe to God is not extraordinary, since each of the survivors continues to give him pleasure, and this is no small...mitigation of his pain [λύπη] for the one who has been sacrificed'.<sup>171</sup>

The use of λυπ- words to describe relational conflict intensifies in Josephus, who records Izates consoling Artabanus—the king of the Parthians—that he should not 'be disturbed at his present calamity' for 'his painful [λύπη] condition' of being withheld from

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<sup>167</sup> See also Tob. 3.10; 7.16-18.

<sup>168</sup> *Leg.* 2.8. See also *Leg.* 3, 250 and *Mut.* 163. *Abr.* 151 notably associates λύπη with συννοία ('anxiety'). Tobit also uses λυπ- words to refer to anxiety (e.g. 7.17). I recognize that the pairing of two lexemes does not constitute *synonymy*. However, it often suggests the meanings of the two words are *similar*.

<sup>169</sup> *Abr.* 205 See also: *Virt.* 103, *Mut.* 167.

<sup>170</sup> *Virt.* 116.

<sup>171</sup> *Abr.* 196. See also *Abr.* 256, *Virt.* 208, *Det.* 99.

the throne by his own people will be resolved soon.<sup>172</sup> Similarly, in the infamous incident between Joseph and Potiphar's wife, Josephus says the latter 'sat sorrowful [κατηφέω]... framing herself so hypocritically and angrily that the pain [λύπη], which was really from her being disappointed [διαμαρτάνω] of her lust, might appear to be for an attempt upon her chastity'.<sup>173</sup> In both cases, λύπη signifies feelings of rejection and, in the first example, perhaps the stronger notion of heartbreak. Josephus also expresses bitterness with λυπ- words, including the response of Jacob's sons to Joseph's predicted prosperity, which 'greatly pained [σφόδρα ἐλύπησε]' them and led to an eagerness 'to kill the boy'.<sup>174</sup> Finally, this word group can refer to remorse: 'When...king David was troubled...and sufficiently confounded, and said, with tears and pain [λύπη], that he had sinned...God had compassion on him'.<sup>175</sup>

While Plutarch can use λυπ- words to refer to general sadness,<sup>176</sup> he also uses these terms in distinctively relational contexts. For example, he reports that Antigones and Teutamus are 'so pained [λυπέω] and jealous [φθονέω]' concerning Eumenes' leadership of the army that they plot to kill him.<sup>177</sup> A similar dynamic is seen in Plutarch's *Demetrius* where the act of Demetrius 'that most pained [λυπέω] the Athenians' was not so much the demand to pay him a sum of money but 'the humiliation [ὀχλέω] of the imposition and the words which accompanied it'.<sup>178</sup> Elsewhere, after claiming to be the happier than anyone else, Croesus is rebuked by Solon, leaving him 'angered' and 'pained [λυπέω], but none the wiser for it'.<sup>179</sup> The Syracusans are likewise 'greatly pained [ἐλύπησε...σφόδρα]' on hearing that Heracleides' conflict with Dion ended in death, thus creating discontent toward Dion's

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<sup>172</sup> *A.J.* 20.59.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.55. See also: 2.147; 6.74; 7.204; 9.227.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.17. See also: 19.176.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.153. See also: 2.166; 7.158; 8.362; 13.47.

<sup>176</sup> *Dion* 55; *Pel.* 35; *Tim.* 6; *Pyrrh.* 31.

<sup>177</sup> *Eum.* 16.

<sup>178</sup> *Demetr.* 27.

<sup>179</sup> *Sol.* 27.



governance that is only quelled by a lavish state funeral.<sup>180</sup> Each of these episodes expresses a pain directed toward an individual, from irritation to the gall of bitterness.<sup>181</sup>

Much like its contemporaries, the New Testament prefers to utilize λυπ- words for mental distress rather than physical pain. The word group is rarely used in the Catholic epistles (three times) and not at all in Revelation, compared to fifteen occurrences in the Gospels and twenty-three in Paul, which cover a host of psychological uses from deep anxiety to general despair.<sup>182</sup> The apostle indicates how his heart breaks concerning the Jews' rejection of his gospel: 'I have great pain [λύπη] and unceasing anguish [ὀδύνη] in my heart. For I wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people' (Rom. 9.2). He also speaks of the potential offense created by idol food: 'If your brother or sister is being pained [λυπέω] by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love' (14.15). Outside of 2 Corinthians, Paul's most frequent employment of λυπ- words concerns the mourning of another's death: Paul would have experienced 'pain [λύπη] upon pain [λύπη]' had he witnessed the passing of Epaphroditus (Phil. 2.27). He also counsels the Thessalonians to 'not grieve [λυπέω] as others do, who have no hope' (1 Th. 4.13).

The enquiry above has revealed a remarkable breadth of meaning for λυπ- words in antiquity. The dominant psychological uses include: sadness/despair, bitterness, mourning, heartbreak, humiliation, jealousy and remorse. These alone are sufficient to suggest that the entries for λύπη and λυπέω in standard lexica, particularly BDAG, do not fully capture their semantic range.<sup>183</sup> This word group requires detailed attention because it can indicate

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<sup>180</sup> *Dio.* 53.

<sup>181</sup> Also see: *Dem.* 11; *Phoc.* 20, 29; *Per.* 10.

<sup>182</sup> Mt. 14.9, 17.23, 18.31, 19.22, 26.22, 26.37; Mk. 10.22, 14.19; Lk 22.45; Jn 16.6, 21.17; 2 Cor. 2.1-5, 7, 6.10, 7.8-11, 9.7.

<sup>183</sup> *BDAG* (3rd ed.), 604-605. The same is true for *EDNT*, vol. 2, 362-365 and *TLNT*, vol. 2, 417-422. There is more awareness of the semantic range in *LSJ* (9th ed.), 1066. But the entry intended for biblical scholars that best captures the potential of this group is *TDNT*, 317-324, which discusses a host of meanings, including the Stoic εἶδη.

a broad sadness or one of several specific emotions that are more precise than its non-specific meanings.<sup>184</sup> As I transition to analyzing which meanings might be present in 2 Corinthians, the concept of *salience* from cognitive semantics is useful. It suggests that context creates intuitive associations between particular objects or beings and a broader category—e.g. a British individual might readily associate 'robin' with the category 'bird'.<sup>185</sup> However, a Mediterranean individual is more likely to associate 'bird' with 'parrot'. While this relates to *cultural* context, it illustrates a similar dynamic with λυπ- words: one must consider whether a specific meaning of λύπη is salient to the literary and historical context of the Corinthian conflict.<sup>186</sup> It is inadvisable to consistently interpret λυπ- words as 'grief' or 'to grieve' when the interpreter can consider whether a particular *kind* of pain is in view—e.g. jealousy or remorse, heartbreak or irritation, bitterness or despair.<sup>187</sup>

### III. A Disaggregation of Λυπ- Words in 2 Corinthians

#### *i. The Corinthians' 'Godly Grief'*

Perhaps the most important form of pain (λύπη) within 2 Corinthians is commonly called the 'godly grief' (7.9). Paul says, 'Even if I pained [ἐλύψα ὑμᾶς] you with my letter, I do not regret it....Now I rejoice, not because you were pained, but because you were pained into repenting, for you felt a godly pain [ἐλυπήθητε κατὰ θεόν]' (7.8-9). This is a unique experience given that λυπ- words are used almost exclusively in antiquity to express negative sentiments.<sup>188</sup> Here the Corinthians experience a *negative* pain that

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<sup>184</sup> This is not meant to conflate the *concept* of pain with the general meanings of the λυπ- word group. I am simply recognizing that the word group can produce both vague and specific meanings depending upon the context.

<sup>185</sup> Dirk Geeraerts, *Theories of Lexical Semantics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 183-203.

<sup>186</sup> This is in accord with the insights of Barr, *Semantics*, 206-262 and Silva, *Meaning*, 137-147.

<sup>187</sup> Here I use 'grief/grieve' to recognize that interpreters often translate λυπ- words in this way. It is also common to use 'sorrow', 'injury' or 'pain' to describe the general meaning of the word group. I prefer the latter because it does not have grief's connotations of mourning a loved one (which would be a sub-type).

<sup>188</sup> See e.g. Welborn, 'Paul and Pain', 547-548 and Barclay, 'Death', 231-234.

produces *positive* results. The use of λυπ- words in connection with a previous letter causes most interpreters to conclude that Paul is referring to the emotion resulting from the painful letter (cf. 2.1-7).<sup>189</sup> When Paul says the Corinthians were pained 'only for a while [εἰ καὶ πρὸς ὥραν]' (v. 8), it seems to most interpreters that *all* of the Corinthians' pain had ceased.

This common reading of 7.5-16 is, however, dependent upon the assumption that when Paul uses the λυπ- word group only one emotion—a general pain—is in view. This seems improbable given Paul's distinction between the godly pain which leads to 'salvation [σωτηρία]' and 'worldly pain [τοῦ κόσμου λύπη]' that produces 'death [θάνατος]' (v. 10). These two categories suggest that the Corinthians' godly pain is a *particular* kind of λύπη. My analysis below will show that the pain of 2.1-7 is interpreted so negatively by Paul that it could certainly qualify for 'worldly' pain that continues to work death in the community.<sup>190</sup> But with respect to the Corinthians' godly pain, it is tied to Paul's impression that the community was 'pained into repentance [ἐλυπήθητε εἰς μετάνοιαν]' (v. 9), thus demonstrating 'earnestness' for their apostle (v. 12). The association between λυπέω and μετάνοια confirms that this pain must be *differentiated* from the pain in 2.1-7, which is only discussed in negative terms, despite the fact that the same word group is employed in both passages. But what is the meaning used in 7.5-16? What Silva refers to as the *context of situation* becomes important at this point.<sup>191</sup> As mentioned above, λυπ- words have been used to describe the pain of David as he repented over the murder of Uriah or the pain of Tobit regarding his perceived sins.<sup>192</sup> These pains are not precisely the same as the

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<sup>189</sup> See p. 33 above.

<sup>190</sup> See p. 49-54 below.

<sup>191</sup> Silva, *Meaning*, 144-45. The context of situation moves beyond, but does not exclude, the literary context. It considers the 'life situation' in which a word is expressed and it can be studied through any circumstantial variable that might influence meaning, including culture, relationships, and behaviour.

<sup>192</sup> See p. 40-45 above.

Corinthians'—they result from different crimes—but each is associated with an act of repentance. In this sense, the situations are similar and therefore, like Tobit and David, the Corinthians should be viewed as suffering *remorse* concerning their wrongdoing in 7.5-16.<sup>193</sup> This means that their pain which lasted 'only for a while' (7.8) is distinctive in meaning and it does not necessarily signal the end of the pain in 2.1-7, only the conclusion of a unique period of remorse.

One might respond that, even if the Corinthians are remorseful, the *scope* of this emotion encompasses all of the pain in 2.1-7—whatever that may be—and causes it to cease. This line of reasoning is favoured by the apparent resolution of the conflict between Paul and Corinth in 7.5-16. Paul does not refer to any other pains in this passage, and he concludes by stating that he has 'complete confidence' in the community (v. 16). But it has recently been recognized that Paul is engaging in a significant amount of rhetorical posturing in this passage: although he elsewhere underlines their rocky relationship (e.g. 1.15-22, 6.10-13, 7.2), here he declares his pride (v. 14) and joy (v. 7b) in the community in an effort to enact full reconciliation.<sup>194</sup> This suggests that the community is still at odds with Paul in 7.5-16 because the reality of their relationship is considerably worse than it appears. Even if one takes 1.1-2.13; 7.5-16 to be a final letter of reconciliation, there is still evidence of quarrelling in 1.15-22 regarding Paul's travel plans. Paul even states that he shares the same *πάθημα* as the Corinthians (1.6)—the only concrete situation which resonates with this term is their mutual experience of *λύπη*. Given that the character of one's relationships influences the nature of one's emotions, the community should still be

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<sup>193</sup> In 7.8, Paul uses *μεταμέλομαι* in conjunction with *λυπ-* words. This word can be translated as 'regret' or 'remorse' (see e.g. Heb. 7.21, Mt 27.3), thus lending support to my analysis of *λυπ-* words in 7.5-16.

<sup>194</sup> See esp. Vegge, *Reconciliation*, 32. Also see Stanley N. Olson, 'Epistolary Uses of Expressions of Self-Confidence', *JBL* 103, no. 4 (1984): 585–97; Stanley N. Olson, 'Pauline Expressions of Confidence in His Addressees', *CBQ* 47, no. 2 (1985): 282–95.

portrayed as in the throes of pain.<sup>195</sup> The Corinthians' remorse is thus more plausibly read as a limited phenomenon. This is perhaps why Paul only connects the godly pain with his painful letter and not the painful visit (e.g. 7.7). Most reconstructions envision the letter focusing on punishment for the offender (e.g. ἐκδίκησις in 7.11) while the visit itself is where the rebellion against Paul's authority largely began.<sup>196</sup> All of this suggests that the pain in 7.5-16 is not a categorical pain which encompasses all of the community's negative emotion; rather, Paul is merely reporting his pleasure with the community for heeding his instructions and punishing the offender. The broader issues related to Paul and his letter—those mentioned in 2.1-7—are not in view.

Although the Corinthians have pleased Paul by enacting punishment against the offender, it is worth noting that this act itself appears to be causing pain for the community. In 2.6-7, Paul is still giving instructions on how to complete the punishment of the offender. This would have created tension, even the loss of friendship, as the obedient Corinthians (the 'majority' in 2.6) followed Paul rather than sympathizers of the offender. Paul refers to this pain when he identifies the effects of the offender's actions, stating, 'But if anyone has caused pain [λυπέω], he has not caused pain to me, but...to all of you [πάντας ὑμᾶς]' (2.5). It is significant that this pain is envisioned as affecting πάντας ὑμᾶς—a struggle within the whole community rather than a particular faction. How would one characterize this widespread form of pain? It would surely have been a powerful emotion, sustained by friction within the community and enflamed by their past struggles with factionalism (e.g. 1 Cor. 1.12-13). As Plutarch says, our pain is greatest 'when one whom

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<sup>195</sup> See e.g. Robert Kaster, *Emotion, Restraint, and Community in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 9 and Daniel M. Gross, *The Secret History of Emotion: From Aristotle's Rhetoric to Modern Brain Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 2-3.

<sup>196</sup> See the dominant models for the offender and offence in sec. I of Ch. 1 above.

we have supposed a true friend quarrels and finds fault with us'.<sup>197</sup> So the community's pain is, as discussed above, similar to Paul's pain for his contemporaries who depart from his gospel (Rom. 9.2). The Corinthians are fractured and whatever social continuity they possessed appears lost. They are likely feeling *relational heartbreak*.<sup>198</sup> Their remorse may have faded, but the negative emotions associated with the punishment of the offender have not been resolved.

## ii. *The Pain of the Offender*

While the Corinthians are completing Paul's instructions concerning the wrongdoer, this individual is experiencing his own λύπη. Paul tells the Corinthians to forgive him so that he will not 'be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow [περισσοτέρῃ λύπῃ]' (2.7). Such a statement implies a current malaise—the offender has already felt the effects of the punishment and is in danger of being overwhelmed.<sup>199</sup> Paul may be referring to the offender's sense of humiliation as he is removed from a place of standing in the community.<sup>200</sup> But the most efficient way to discern the meaning is to sample various emotions: humiliation, sadness, and heartbreak all do some justice to the context. Perhaps a reaction to separation and exile is in view, much like Uzziah's 'terrible punishment' that left him alone and 'out of the city' before he died 'with pain [λύπη] and anxiety'.<sup>201</sup> But Paul's focus is a current pain with the potential to increase in *magnitude* given the use of

<sup>197</sup> *Mor.* 463B. Also see Sir. 37.2.

<sup>198</sup> This emotion refers to 'overwhelming sorrow or distress' with respect to human relationships (see *SOED*, 1206). It bears resemblance to Paul's use of ἔρις (i.e. strife) in contexts of conflict. See 1 Cor. 3.3 and Gal 5.20. According to *Louw-Nida*, vol. 1, 492, the term ἔρις is not inherently emotional but there is overlap between its domain (39.22) and emotive terms, including λύπη (25.274-5).

<sup>199</sup> See e.g. Barrett, *Corinthians*, 92 and Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 133.

<sup>200</sup> See e.g. Seneca, *Ira* 2.27.4: 'We have been punished. Let us consider not what we suffer, but what we have done. Let us deliberate on our past. If we are frank with ourselves, we will impose on ourselves a still stiffer fine.'

<sup>201</sup> Josephus, *A.J.* 9.226-227. Also see 12.179.

περισσός (v. 7). The safest interpretive option is a sense of growing despair, much like occurrences in Philo and the LXX.<sup>202</sup>

If one accepts that the Corinthian offender was in despair, denoted by the λύπη of 2.7, this marks at least the third distinct use of pain in 2 Corinthians (i.e. remorse, heartbreak, despair). All of these contribute to the emerging situation in Corinth—a scene of varying, complex forms of λύπη in which two specific pains are ongoing concerns for the community.

### *iii. Paul's Pain*

Although Paul's experience of pain is not my focus, it is worth noting briefly to gain a broader perspective on the use of λυπ- words in 2 Corinthians. Paul admits that his previous visit to the community was 'painful' (2.1) and he wants to prevent future pain: 'I wrote as I did, so that...I might not suffer pain [λύπη]' (v. 3). Paul's lament is appropriate for the founder of a rebellious community. The Corinthians are his 'children' (6.13, 12.14), likely contributing to his initial sense of 'regret' (7.8) over the painful letter. Ovid remarks, 'After a harsh decision, the parent is himself saddened, for he virtually lays the punishment on himself that he exacts from his child'.<sup>203</sup>

While it is difficult to determine—strictly from the text of 2.1-3—whether Paul's λύπη is ongoing,<sup>204</sup> the fact that Paul defends himself against accusations of vacillation and expresses 'anxiety' for the Corinthians (e.g. 1.17; 11.28) suggests that the conditions giving rise to his λύπη are ongoing. This is especially the case given that Paul does not describe any resolution to his pain in 2.1-3. But how might one describe his emotion? Paul

<sup>202</sup> See p. 40-45 above. This usage is similar to Paul's use of ἐξασπαρέω in 2 Cor. 1.8 and 4.8, which I translate as 'despair'. For more on the emotional import of this term see *BDAG*, 345.

<sup>203</sup> *Epistulae ex Ponto* 2.2.117-118.

<sup>204</sup> The verbs used in these verses do not indicate ongoing pain (or deny it). For a possible explanation of why Paul is so vague here regarding his experience, see p. 54 below.

is bothered by the rebellion of his spiritual children—much like Artabanus, mentioned above, who was removed from his throne by his people.<sup>205</sup> The apostle does not possess a general pain; instead, he feels the sting of rejection, especially the *heartbreak* of an affront from his community.

At this point, one sees more clearly how my argument contradicts the consensus on λυπ- words. This word group does not merely have a diverse semantic range; instead, Paul traverses the breadth of this range within 2 Corinthians. It is significant that in almost every occurrence of λυπ- words thus far the context suggests a specific meaning. Although λυπ- words can refer to a general pain, it appears this option has become for modern interpreters what C.S. Lewis calls the 'dangerous sense' of a word.<sup>206</sup> He explains: 'The dominant sense of any word lies uppermost in our minds. Wherever we meet the word, our natural impulse will be to give it that sense. When this operation results in nonsense...we see our mistake and try over again. But if it makes *tolerable* sense our tendency is to go merrily on. We are often deceived.'<sup>207</sup> It does indeed make *some* sense to understand the λυπ- words discussed thus far as general 'pain', but to do so is to overlook the precise conditions of the context—the strife between Paul and the community or the connection between godly pain and repentance.

#### *iv. The Corinthians' Pain Toward Paul*

The final and most troubling emotion reported by Paul is the one that places the community at odds with the apostle himself: 'For if *I* cause *you* pain [λυπῶ], who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained [ὁ λυπούμενος]?' (2.2) (*italics mine*). Although the conditional statement could stipulate that this pain is hypothetical, the ability

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<sup>205</sup> See p. 40-45 above.

<sup>206</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 13.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*



of the apostle to envision such a pain suggests that it has some basis in reality. This is confirmed by the preceding sentence, where Paul says that his visit was 'painful [ἐν λύπῃ]' (v. 1)—a label so general that it cannot refer merely to his own pain. In fact, it is widely recognized that this is the visit where the offense against Paul occurs, and that the visit was painful for both sides given the intensity, and possibly public nature, of the disagreement (cf. v. 5).<sup>208</sup> When Paul begins the following sentence with εἰ γάρ (v. 2), he indicates that he is reasoning from the trauma of the last visit to his explanation for why he has yet to make another visit.<sup>209</sup> In other words, the sense in which he pains the Corinthians is not so much a *hypothetical* pain that has not come to fruition; rather, it is a *pre-existing* pain which would have exasperated the Corinthians had he chosen to visit again. This makes sense in light of the many instances where the Corinthians appear sour towards Paul, not least being that his painful letter was perceived as unduly harsh given his need to clarify that he did not write 'to cause pain [λυπέω]' but to demonstrate his 'love [ἀγάπη]' (2.4). The community has also harboured serious questions about Paul's teaching for some time (e.g. 1 Cor. 5.1; 7.1), and they are now accusing him (or will do so soon<sup>210</sup>) of poor preaching (11.6; 10.10), being unreliable (1.19-22), and generally being 'weak' (10.10; 11.21; 13.9). As the community punished the wrongdoer (2.6-7), they would have been reminded that the apostle they despised had gotten the better of them.<sup>211</sup> But why does Paul refer to the Corinthians' pain so cautiously, even utilizing a conditional statement? As we will see, it is

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<sup>208</sup> See sec. I of Ch. 1 above.

<sup>209</sup> E.g. Fredrick J. Long, *2 Corinthians: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, BHGNT (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015), 51 and Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, WBC 40 (Waco: Word Books, 1986), 35.

<sup>210</sup> This depends upon how one understands the composition of 2 Corinthians. See p. 76-83 below.

<sup>211</sup> One might object that it is implausible for the Corinthians to feel humiliation when they have already admitted wrongdoing (i.e. 2 Cor. 7.5-16). Carlin A. Barton, *Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 190, notes, 'For the Romans, it was the debt itself [including that of moral correction] that humiliated and chained one.'

rhetorically advantageous for him to tread lightly regarding the Corinthians' rebellion given that he wants to enact reconciliation.<sup>212</sup>

The *context of situation* described above suggests that only the most pernicious emotions capture the community's pain toward Paul (2.2): hatred, irritation, or resentment. The gall of the Corinthians is less intense than the murderous plot of Antigones and Teutamus noted earlier, but the underlying situation is similar because it involves an intense pain toward another that accompanies rebellion. The Corinthians likewise withhold joy from Paul (2.3), demand references (3.1-3), and ignore his gospel (11.4). I chose to describe the pain of Antigones and Teutamus as an intense bitterness, and this seems appropriate for the Corinthians too. They resonate with Philo, who describes a feud in which one feels 'pain [λύπη]' toward one's neighbour to the point that it prevents the exercise of due kindness.<sup>213</sup>

Yet some may object: if Paul's use of λυπ- words signifies several distinct emotions, why did he use a seemingly ambiguous word group as opposed to more precise terminology? This question overlooks how the diverse emotional spectrum in Corinth *supports* the apostle's lexical choice—the λυπ- word group creates rhetorical unity for a situation that is otherwise in total disarray. By exclusively utilizing λυπ- words, Paul expresses a precious degree of solidarity with his community even though their individual emotions may differ. If he had used πικρία, for instance, to refer to the Corinthians' bitterness, the rhetorical effect would have been lost. Paul elsewhere uses other *portmanteau* terms such as σάρξ (Gal. 2.20, 5.16-24) or, to a lesser extent, καυχάομαι (Rom. 3.20-21, 5.3-5) to nuance his argument and to establish connections that would

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<sup>212</sup> See p. 54 below.

<sup>213</sup> *Virt.* 116. This form of pain is also in view with Paul's use of πικρία in Rom. 3.14. This term is often translated as 'bitterness' (see *BDAG* (3rd ed.), 813). According to *Louw-Nida*, vol. 1, 288, the domain of πικρία (88.201) overlaps considerably with several emotions, including λύπη (25.274-5).

otherwise be impossible.<sup>214</sup> But perhaps the best explanation for Paul's word choice stems from Welborn's insight that ancient letters aiming for reconciliation never named previous offences lest they insult the individual or group with whom reconciliation is desired.<sup>215</sup> There can be little doubt at this point that the community's many pains are preventing reconciliation with Paul (e.g. 2.2; 7.2, 12). The apostle even states that they have prevented him from visiting the community again (2.1-2). So Paul likely follows the lead of Cicero and Demosthenes, whose conciliatory letters aim to enact reconciliation through the 'deliberate forgetfulness' of the offence and offender.<sup>216</sup> While only some of the material composing 2 Corinthians would satisfy the ancient conciliatory genre (i.e. 1.1-2.13; 7.5-16), it still follows that Paul generally avoided a clear synopsis of the community's pains to engender a sense of goodwill and avoid dwelling upon past hurts.

#### v. Conclusion

Therefore, the distinct nature of the Corinthians' bitterness toward Paul in 2.1-2 serves as the final proof that the community's pains are variegated and not to be identified with the remorse of 7.5-16 that concluded in repentance. My analysis of λυπ- words in 2 Corinthians demonstrates that, as a result of Paul's painful visit and letter, the community is feeling an ongoing mixture of bitterness and heartbreak in 2.1-2, 4-5, while Paul notes their past remorse in 7.5-16. The offender continues to struggle with despair in 2.7 and Paul himself expresses his heartbreak in 2.3. This reading of the situation utilizes the

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<sup>214</sup> The use of σάρξ for both the circumcision advocated by the opponents and a broader, evil power allows Paul to efficiently establish the error of the Galatians' position. See e.g. Peter Oakes, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 174 and Oliver O'Donovan, 'Flesh and Spirit' in *Galatians and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 271-284. In Romans, Paul uses καυχῶμαι to refer either to the self-glorification of his interlocutors or the confidence in God produced by his gospel. The dramatic reversal in one's boasting that results from the gospel would have been somewhat lost if Paul employed different words to describe these two divergent behaviours. See e.g. Richard Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2016), 559 and Simon Gathercole, *Where is Boasting? Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul's Response in Romans 1-5* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 252-262.

<sup>215</sup> Welborn, 'Identification', 151.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

semantic potential of  $\lambda\upsilon\pi$ - words while ensuring that each assigned meaning is tied to the historical, literary, and relational context. It also has the benefit of recognizing the lingering nature of human emotion: even if one is optimistic about the Paul-Corinth relationship, it is unreasonable to assume that a community could quickly eradicate strong feelings of ill will toward someone that they have long despised. At least some of these emotions extend to the whole community (i.e. 'all of you' [2.5]) and they are likely influenced by a set of judgments being made about Paul and his ministry (e.g. 1.19-22; 10.10). Paul portrays the Corinthians' pain as a key catalyst in the deterioration of their relationship (2.1-3). In other words, the pain in Corinth is not a brief whimper; rather, it is a longstanding cacophony of multiple voices.

By concluding that the Corinthians' pain is variegated, a key consensus within the prevailing research paradigm has been challenged. Most interpreters believe that the Corinthians' pain faded quickly, leading to a new crisis: the arrival of super-apostles in Corinth who aim to commandeer the community by accusing Paul of being weak in appearance and speech (10.10).<sup>217</sup> This results in the community being characterized as 'the strong' and the strength in weakness paradox being read as a confrontational device that vindicates Paul's ministry.<sup>218</sup> But it is now clear that these interpretations are aided by what appears to be *the false assumption* that the Corinthians' pain had ceased. The present characterizations of the community are thus inaccurate: they cannot be read simply as rebellious and proud because they have also been hurt by their conflict with Paul. They were surprised by the vigour of the apostle's rebuke and, by harbouring questions about his leadership, the sting of Paul's moral correction deepens to a series of humiliating

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<sup>217</sup> See p. 33-36 above.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid. Also sec. I. of Ch. 1.

emotions.<sup>219</sup> This opens the door to re-envisioning the Paul-Corinth relationship, not as one of enmity only, but a relationship in which Paul must comfort the community in the midst of their pain and suffering. While the ongoing nature of the Corinthians' pains must be confirmed over the course of my exegetical analysis—where I will look for more evidence of pain—my conclusions are sufficient to form the hypothesis that the community has ongoing pains.

#### IV. Implications for the Corinthian Situation and Literary Integrity Problem

Having hypothesized that the Corinthians possess ongoing pains—thus drawing into question a widely-held assumption about the nature of the Corinthian situation—I provide here a series of arguments that explore the literary, social, and theological implications of my conclusions. These relate to the following issues: 1) the relationship between the Corinthians' 'pain' and Paul's 'weakness'; 2) the community's experience of pain in its social context; and 3) the literary integrity problem. Prior to discussing the latter, I offer a summary of my view on the Corinthian situation and the particular problem which occasions the material in 2 Corinthians.<sup>220</sup> Each of these issues is ultimately prefatory to my exegetical analyses, where the focus will be the theology of the strength in weakness paradox. The items discussed below will both inform my exegesis and be re-assessed within it.

##### *i. The Relationship Between the Corinthians' 'Pain' and Paul's 'Weakness'*

The most immediate implication stemming from the hypothesis that the Corinthians have ongoing pains concerns Paul's strength in weakness discourses. These have often been viewed as Paul's response to accusations concerning his own *personal suffering*,

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<sup>219</sup> I explore the connection between the Corinthians' λύπη and shame on p. 71-76.

<sup>220</sup> See p. 74-76 below.

especially in those passages of chs. 10-13 which employ ἄσθεν- words.<sup>221</sup> The source of the apostle's ἄσθεν- terminology has traditionally been the opponents' use of this word group: 'For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his presence is weak [ἄσθενής], and his speech contemptible [ἐξουθενημένος]"' (10.10).<sup>222</sup> Paul responds with a 'rhetorical flourish'<sup>223</sup> by referencing a 'power made perfect in weakness [ἄσθενεία]' (12.9) that leads to the famous declaration: 'when I am weak [ἄσθενέω], then I am strong [δυνατός]' (12.10).

Although the strength in weakness discourses are inherently autobiographical, the conclusions reached above concerning the Corinthian situation signal the possibility of a deeper, communal reading wherein Paul's discourses serve as a model for the pained Corinthians. Similar readings have been proposed by Stegman, Ellington, and Gorman, all of whom suggest that Paul's suffering discourses are invitations for the Corinthians to abandon their rebellion and share in Paul's sufferings for Christ.<sup>224</sup> The problem with such readings, however, is that they fail to identify why the Corinthians would be so interested in learning how to suffer well.<sup>225</sup> The community is generally not understood to be suffering. In fact, a concrete situation for the affliction that they share with Paul (i.e. 1.3-11) has never been identified.<sup>226</sup> But if it could be shown that the Corinthians' pains are similar to Paul's weakness, the strength in weakness discourses would seem more applicable to the community. More than this, Paul's objective in the material composing 2 Corinthians would have to be re-evaluated. He would not merely be confronting Corinthian accusations, but consoling the community and building them up amidst their own experiences of weakness. Consequently, this sub-section explores the literary and

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<sup>221</sup> See sec. I of Ch. 1.

<sup>222</sup> See e.g. Harris, *Corinthians*, 869; Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:834; J. Lambrecht, 'The Fool's Speech and Its Context : Paul's Particular Way of Arguing in 2 Cor 10-13', *Biblica* 82, no. 3 (2001): 305-24 [324].

<sup>223</sup> Stegman, *Corinthians*, 250. Also see Witherington, *Corinthians*, 35-68.

<sup>224</sup> See the description of their work in sec. III of Ch. 1.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> For more on this lacuna, see sec. II.ii of Ch. 3.

theological justifications for a connection between the Corinthians' pains (λύπη) and Paul's weakness (ἀσθένεια).

#### a. Λυπ- and Ἀσθεν- Words in Antiquity

While the simultaneous employment of λυπ- and ἀσθεν- words is not very common in antiquity, it is certainly not unprecedented either. Plutarch is representative of several ancient authors when he suggests that weakness—relating to a lack of maturity in one's philosophical tradition—leads to pain: 'For it is weakness [ἀσθένεια]...that brings men into endless pains [λύπη] and terrors [φόβος] when they are not trained by reason to endure the assaults of fortune.'<sup>227</sup> In perhaps the most extensive treatment of pain in the first century, Dio Chrysostom reasons that 'the intelligent man should not feel pain [λύπη] about anything whatever' because it is only 'weakness [ἀσθένεια] on our part' that creates it.<sup>228</sup> In fact, anyone who 'suffers pain [λυπέω]' should be diagnosed with a 'weak [ἀσθενής]' spirit.<sup>229</sup> Similar patterns emerge in Baruch 2.18 and Sirach 38.18, where the latter states that 'a heart of pain [λύπη] saps one's strength [ἰσχύς].'<sup>230</sup> In Philippians 2.27, Paul states that he would have felt pain (λύπη) had the sickness (ἀσθενέω) of Epaphroditus been prolonged. Although Paul is not primarily using the ἀσθεν- word group to refer to death or intellectual deficit in 2 Corinthians (as we will see below), these passages confirm that there is the *potential* for Paul to view Corinthian pain as the *result* of weakness or one of its *types*. But Paul never uses the λυπ- and ἀσθεν- word groups together in the same sentence in 2 Corinthians, so any deciding evidence that connects these two groups must ultimately come from elsewhere.

<sup>227</sup> Solon 7.4. Also see Aristotle *Nic Eth.* 1150b; Plutarch's *Philopoemen* 20; Philodemus, *Ir.* 43.14-41.

<sup>228</sup> *Or.* 16.4. Also see 16.11.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.11. The word here is σώματος, but it seems apparent that an individual's broader 'spirit' or 'person' is at issue.

<sup>230</sup> The use of ἰσχύς is significant because it is an antonym for ἀσθένεια, e.g. Judg. 16.17; Ps. 30.11; Is. 44.12; Lam 1.14.

## b. Lexical Cohesion and Paired Opposites

A more promising line of enquiry stems from the trend observed previously that interpreters sometimes analyze Paul's strength in weakness material through passages that do not utilize either the *δυν-* or *ἀσθεν-* word groups.<sup>231</sup> The analyses completed by Lim and Savage especially rely on this material—particularly the 'treasure in jars of clay' metaphor (2 Cor. 4.7)—to analyze what Paul means by 'strength in weakness'.<sup>232</sup> Neither author totally justifies his approach, but I suggest that each nonetheless appears defensible through what linguists refer to as 'lexical cohesion': the intuitive sense in which a discourse is judged to be cogent through its repeated employment of certain terms or kinds of terms.<sup>233</sup> Scholars are virtually unanimous in holding that such cohesion is provided in 2 Corinthians through Paul's use of suffering terminology. The apostle writes 'as kin to the poet and literary artist' in his use of the 'language of affliction'.<sup>234</sup> Lim likewise writes, 'Paul frequently interjects the theme of suffering in the midst of his argument on various issues confronting the Corinthians'.<sup>235</sup> The apostle accomplishes this with a cache of terms to describe suffering, including *θλῖψις* (9 times), *θάνατος* (9 times), *πάθημα* (3 times), *στενοχωρία* (2 times) and *ἐξαπορέω* (2 times).<sup>236</sup> Paul sometimes employs these terms interchangeably within the same discourse (e.g. *πάθημα-θλῖψις* in 1.3-7; *νέκρωσις-θάνατος* in 4.8-12), thus signaling that he is aware of their shared meaning: experiences of human

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<sup>231</sup> See sec. III of Ch. 1. Also see Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 268-303 and Harris, *Corinthians*, 163.

<sup>232</sup> Savage, *Power*, 164-86 and Lim, *Sufferings*, 40-157.

<sup>233</sup> For more on the concept of 'lexical cohesion', see M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan, *Cohesion in English*, Reprint ed. (London: Routledge, 2014), 4-14. Also see Beata Beigman Klebanov and Eli Shamir, 'Reader-Based Exploration of Lexical Cohesion', *Language Resources and Evaluation* 41, no. 1 (February 2007): 27-44 [27-8].

<sup>234</sup> Karl A. Plank, *Paul and the Irony of Affliction* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 1, 3.

<sup>235</sup> Lim, *Sufferings*, 1.

<sup>236</sup> Respectively: 2 Cor. 1.4, 8, 2.4, 4.17, 6.4, 7.4, 8.2, 8.13; 1.9, 2.16, 3.7, 4.11, 7.10, 11.23; 1.5-7; 6.4, 12.10; 1.8, 4.8.



deprivation, trial, and loss.<sup>237</sup> Crucially, Paul uses certain terms to refer to both his experience and the Corinthians' (e.g. θλίψις in 1.3-7).

The lexical cohesion created by Paul's suffering terminology in 2 Corinthians is significant because λυπ- (18 times) and ἄσθεν- (14 times) words readily fit the general sense of trial and deprivation being denoted by the apostle's other suffering words.<sup>238</sup> For instance, weakness refers to Paul's sense of defeat in resisting the thorn in the flesh (12.7-9; also 10.10, 11.30-33) while pain refers to the relational conflict of apostle and community (2.1-7). This latter usage is especially important because it shows, like θλίψις above, that Paul's suffering terms can be applied to the Corinthians. In fact, being under the influence of λύπη, the community would have intuitively recognized the similarities between their experience and those described with other suffering terms, such as ἄσθεν- words. Any barrier constructed between Paul's ἀσθένεια and the Corinthians' λύπη thus appears artificial in light of the intuitive connections created by the apostle's suffering terminology.

The connection between λυπ- and ἄσθεν- words—premised upon their similarity in meaning—is confirmed by the structural usage of Paul's suffering terminology. Rather than being utilized independently, the apostle tends to pair suffering terms with opposites. He begins in chapter one with the παράκλησις/θλίψις pairing, where he refers to bringing 'consolation' for those in 'affliction' (1.4). He picks up a contrast between light (φῶς) and darkness (σκότος) at the beginning of chapter four, before proceeding to 4.7-18, where a contrast between life (ζωή) and death (νέκρωσις) is developed after its initial beginning in

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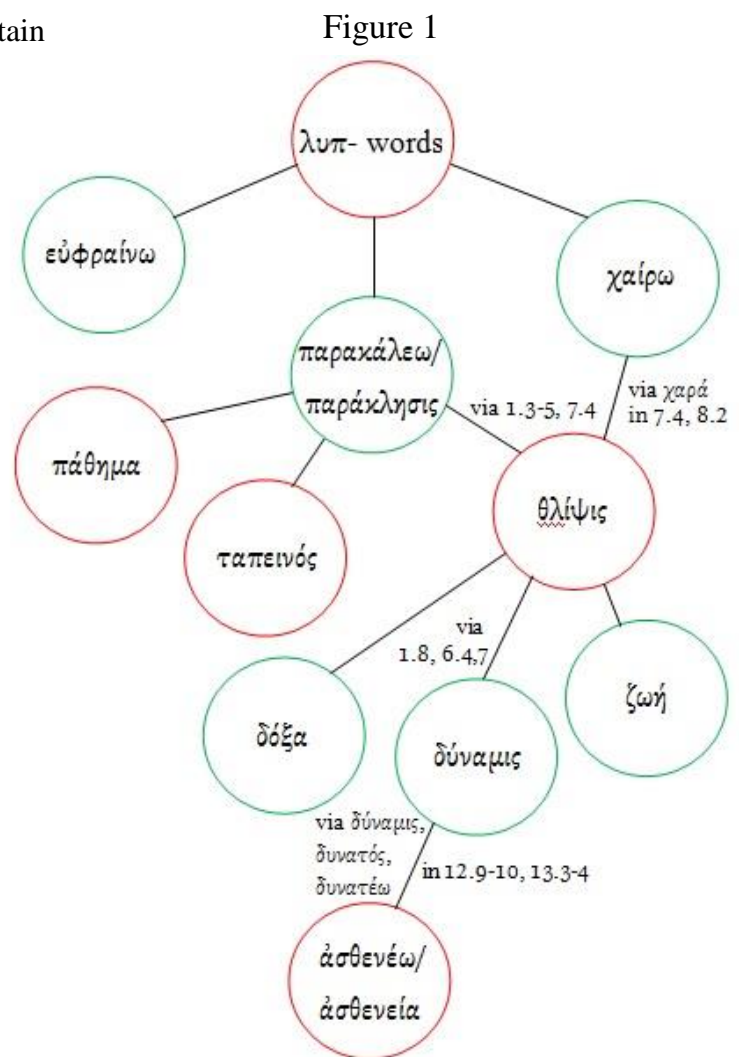
<sup>237</sup> See e.g. 2 Cor 1.3-11; 4.7-12; 6.1-10. It is significant that *Louw-Nida* has some of these terms sharing the 'Trouble, Hardship' domain (p. 242ff): θλίψις (22.2), στενοχωρία (22.10), ἀσθενής (22.3), and σκόλος (22.20).

<sup>238</sup> See e.g. Rom. 8.26, 1 Cor. 2.3 (ἀσθένεια); Phil 2.27, 2 Cor 2.3 (λύπη). Also see '25.269 ἀσθένεια', *Louw-Nida*, vol. 1, p. 318 and '25.272 λύπη', *Louw-Nida*, vol. 1, p. 318. Although ἄσθεν- words also fall under subdomain 22.3, at least some occurrences share the 'Attitudes and Emotions' (25) domain with λυπ- words and, more specifically, are placed only one subdomain apart from them.

1.8-11.<sup>239</sup> This culminates with δυν- and ἀσθεν- terms in chs. 10-13 (e.g. 12.9-10; 13.4). It is notable that Paul's use of λυπ- words seamlessly follows the pattern of this scheme. In 2.7, the apostle contrasts λύπη and παρακαλέω—one of the key terms from 1.3-11. When Paul returns to λυπ- words in 7.5-16, he contrasts the godly grief (κατὰ θεὸν λύπη) that leads to repentance and the worldly grief (τοῦ κόσμου λύπη) that leads to death. By envisioning the Corinthians' experience in a similar pattern to his own—one of contrasting pairs—an implicit connection is formed with Paul's experience of strength in weakness.

Alongside the structural similarities between Paul's suffering and the Corinthians', there is an important semantic insight relating to the use of paired opposites. The diagram on the right (Figure 1) highlights certain

suffering terms and their paired opposites within 2 Corinthians. Λυπ- words are contrasted with χαίρω (2.3) and παρακαλέω (2.7), which are both contrasted elsewhere with θλίψις. Ἀσθενεια is contrasted with δύναμις, which is also paired with θλίψις (1.8, 6.4,7). This means the distance between λυπ- and



<sup>239</sup> Also e.g. δόξα-θλίψις (4.17), θλίψις-δύναμις (6.4,7), χαίρω-λύπεω (6.10), παρακαλέω-ταπεινός (7.4)

ἀσθεν- words is only one suffering term (θλιψις).<sup>240</sup> In other words, these two word groups are so closely related that Paul can use θλιψις as a synonym for either word group. This represents yet another piece of circumstantial evidence that Paul addresses the pains of his previous visit and letter through his ἀσθεν- terminology.

### c. Strength and Weakness as Concepts

So far, I have only been thinking about λυπ- and ἀσθεν- words in terms of semantic similarity. I want to return now to the possibility raised earlier that experiences of pain are a *type* of weakness. This seems evident in the suffering catalogue of 11.21-29, where Paul mentions his experiences of πληγή (v. 23), θάνατος (v. 23), κίνδυνος (v. 26), and μέριμνα (v. 28) before summarizing: 'Who is weak (ἀσθενεῖ), and I am not weak (ἀσθενῶ)?' (v. 29). It is notable that the catalogue includes terms which, among other things, express physical suffering (i.e. πληγή), psychological distress (i.e. μέριμνα), and vulnerable situations over which Paul had no control (i.e. κίνδυνος). In this sense, weakness is a comprehensive concept in 2 Corinthians that incorporates a variety of word groups.<sup>241</sup> It possesses local uses, such as Paul's poor appearance (10.10) or his humility (13.9), but these contribute to a wider, conceptual whole that is representative of Paul's suffering terminology.<sup>242</sup> This means that when Paul uses an ἀσθεν- word in 2 Corinthians, the occurrence needs to be understood in its particular passage, but also considered more broadly for how it relates to

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<sup>240</sup> To be fair, θλιψις is a broad term (e.g. Rom. 2.9; Phil 1.17, 4.14). But it is far from plastic in its meaning, typically taken to refer to a decidedly negative experience in which one suffers loss or harm. See 'θλιψις', BDAG (3rd ed.), 457 for further discussion.

<sup>241</sup> Although they do not consider the implications, the majority of commentators likewise understand Paul's statement about his weakness to be comprehensive. See e.g. Martin, *Corinthians*, 382; Barrett, *Corinthians*, 301-02; Furnish, *Corinthians*, 538; Windisch, *Korinther*, 361; Long, *Handbook*, 222. For more on the meaning of δυν- and ἀσθεν- words, see Johannes Krug, *Die Kraft des Schwachen: ein Beitrag zur paulinischen Apostolatstheologie* (Tübingen: Francke, 2001), 37-116.

<sup>242</sup> Likewise John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), II: 379 says that Paul's use of ἀσθεν- words refers to 'the weakness of our nature, as well as all tokens of abasement.' The distinction between word and concept is elucidated by Barr, *Semantics*, 1, 16-17, 207.

experiences of weakness discussed elsewhere. Likewise, the apostle's use of *δυν-* terminology has local uses, such as Paul's miraculous works (12.12), but it can also refer to a broader conceptual whole, especially when paired with an *ἀσθεν-* term (e.g. 12.9-10). If the weakness concept relates to humility (4.7; 11.30), incompetence (3.5; 1.8-9), and vulnerability (4.12; 11.28-29), then Paul's concept of strength communicates confidence (10.3-6; 12.9b), competence (11.6), and resilience (4.8-9,16).

Before considering how *λυπ-* words might relate to Paul's concept of weakness, the broad nature of the strength and weakness concepts suggests that these categories need to be properly characterized. Most studies relating to Paul's letters suggest that they are socio-cultural phenomena, referring to a division between the honoured and dishonoured.<sup>243</sup> But these studies largely relate to Romans and 1 Corinthians, where Paul's use of the *δυν-* and *ἀσθεν-* terms generally refers to different people groups in the same community (e.g. 1 Cor. 8; Rom. 14). 2 Corinthians is unique because these terms become fixed on one individual: the apostle Paul (e.g. 10.10; 11.21-29; 12.7-10). It is widely recognized that 2 Corinthians sees Paul become extremely personal, not least because he spends so much time describing his weaknesses and vulnerabilities.<sup>244</sup> Gorman rightly states that the apostle's strength and weakness language refers to his 'experience' and his 'apostolic existence'.<sup>245</sup> It also holds a deeply theological element because it is connected to Christ's own experience of strength and weakness (e.g. 12.9; 13.4). Black states, 'Weakness, therefore, cannot be understood apart from both...Paul and his relationship to Christ.'<sup>246</sup> By relating his strength and weakness concepts to both the Christ event and his own struggles,

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<sup>243</sup> See e.g. Mark Reasoner, *The Strong and the Weak: Romans 14.1-15.13 in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 45-63; Black, *Weakness*, 13; Savage, *Weakness*, 54-102.

<sup>244</sup> See sec. I of Ch. 1.

<sup>245</sup> Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 268.

<sup>246</sup> Black, *Weakness*, 237.

Paul shows that these terms ultimately relate to his concept of personal identity.<sup>247</sup> This is clearest in 12.10 where Paul says, 'when I am weak [ἀσθενέω], then I am strong [δυνατός].' Paul does not refer here to a particular people group—this is an unqualified personal statement. So it is plausible to follow Lim and Savage in reading the categories of strength and weakness as relating to all of Paul's suffering terminology. Paul is employing these terms as wide-ranging concepts, meaning that it is justifiable to utilize strength and weakness categories wherever similar experiences of deprivation are noted in 2 Corinthians.

The more important observation for my present purposes is that λυπ- words fit nicely under the *concept* of weakness: they indicate emotions that involve deprivation and struggle.<sup>248</sup> This is especially true given that μέριμνα—a synonym for φόβος, which is a species of λύπη<sup>249</sup>—is included in the catalogue of 11.21-29 that summarizes different forms of weakness. The Corinthians' pains are not merely semantically similar to weakness, they are *a kind of weakness*. In technical terms, λύπη is a hyponym of weakness. This means that the weakness concept gains a third dimension: it can refer to Paul's identity, Christ's identity, *and the Corinthians' too*. When Paul declares that the Corinthians are pained like him (2.1-7), this means—in his terminological universe—that they are undergoing a form of weakness not unlike his own. This is one of the great ironies

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<sup>247</sup> Identity relates to a 'multiplicity of factors', but is generally centred upon 'cognitive, emotional, and evaluative dimensions' and thus incorporates 'both belief and behaviour' (see David G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics* [London: Bloomsbury, 2015], 100-01). Although Horrell is referring to 'social' rather than 'personal' identity, this distinction largely relates to whether one is referring to an individual or a group of people. The definition is otherwise the same, e.g. identity is 'the characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is' (*SOED*, 996). Nguyen makes use of the term 'identity' in his study of 2 Corinthians, where he concludes that Paul's argument presents a new understanding of *persona* (see V. Henry T. Nguyen, *Christian Identity in Corinth: A Comparative Study of 2 Corinthians, Epictetus and Valerius Maximus*, WUNT 243 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008], 215-222).

<sup>248</sup> See p. 60 above.

<sup>249</sup> See p. 41, fnnt. 164 and p. 41-2 above.

in Paul's most personal letter: it is by talking about himself that Paul incorporates and addresses the Corinthians' own experience.

An objection might follow that it seems strange for the Corinthians' pains to be a kind of weakness, yet Paul never explicitly recognizes this. It is worth noting that I respond to this objection at a number of points in my exegesis of 2 Corinthians where, in context, it seems that Paul is referencing the Corinthians' pain in connection with his experience of weakness.<sup>250</sup> The reason for Paul's subtlety may, however, be seen as the product of a wise pastoral strategy: Paul resists explicit reference to the Corinthians' pains as a weakness because he does not want to embarrass them. As will be shown below, an experience of λύπη was generally viewed as dishonourable in antiquity.<sup>251</sup> So to describe the Corinthians as being in weakness—the very situation occupied by their supposedly inferior apostle—would only add insult to injury. A similar logic was proposed at least as early as Calvin, who comments on Paul's preference for gentleness in 2 Cor. 10.2: 'It is the duty of a good pastor to allure his sheep peacefully and kindly, that they may allow themselves to be governed, rather than restrained by violence.'<sup>252</sup> A more historically-grounded rationale for Paul's subtlety derives from the work of Welborn that was mentioned previously. In his effort to understand why Paul does not refer to the Corinthians' rebellion in the 'conciliatory letter' (1.1-2.13; 7.1-2, 5-16), he observes that ancient letters aiming for reconciliation never named previous offences lest they insult the individual or group with whom reconciliation is desired.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> See esp. sec. V.ii of Ch. 4, as well as sec. II.iii of Ch. 3 and sec. II.ii of Ch. 5.

<sup>251</sup> See p. 71-76 below.

<sup>252</sup> Calvin, *Corinthians*, II:319. For a different explanation that nonetheless tries to understand Paul's change of tone from his perspective as pastor, see Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 368.

<sup>253</sup> Welborn, 'Identification', 151.

#### d. Theological Connections: Christ and the Depths of Pain

Despite the semantic and literary evidence marshalled above, one might still question whether Paul's rhetorical manoeuvring is sufficient to justify reading the strength in weakness discourses in light of the Corinthians' pain. Best objects, 'It would therefore have been pointless for [Paul] to present himself to the Corinthians at this stage as an example. If they regard him as a rogue he would not wish them to copy him in his alleged roguery'.<sup>254</sup> But this remark totally overlooks what Paul and Corinth have in common: Paul considers the Corinthians to be believers (e.g. 13.5). Although the apostle clearly refers to his own experience in his strength in weakness discourses, each one is decisively shaped by the Christ event (e.g. 1:8-11, 4:10-12, 5:14-15). In 13.4, Paul relates his experience of weakness to Christ's death and resurrection: 'He was crucified in weakness [ἐξ ἀσθενείας], but he lives by the power of God [ἐκ δυνάμεως θεοῦ]. We also are weak in him [ἀσθενοῦμεν ἐν αὐτῷ], but by God's power [ἐκ δυνάμεως θεοῦ] we will live with him in our dealing with you.' It appears that as Christ participated in human weakness, the apostle is able to participate in divine strength.<sup>255</sup> If Paul believes the Corinthians still identify with Christ, it is unclear why his experience of strength in weakness must only concern his debate with the opponents.<sup>256</sup> As Gaventa concludes with respect to 2 Corinthians: 'God has, in the gospel of Jesus Christ, irretrievably bound together the apostle and the church.'<sup>257</sup> This forms a strong basis upon which to claim that the Corinthians would look to their spiritual 'father' (6.13; 12.14) during their crisis of pain—albeit hesitatingly—to learn how he responds to weakness.

<sup>254</sup> Ernest Best, *Paul and His Converts* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 66.

<sup>255</sup> This dynamic will be discussed further in my analysis of 13.1-5. See sec. VI of Ch. 5.

<sup>256</sup> To be fair, 2 Cor. 13.4-5 reveals some discontinuity between Paul and the Corinthians: Paul is identified with Christ, and through this connection, he ministers to the Corinthians and tests their faith. See sec. II of Ch. 3 for more discussion on continuity and discontinuity in the relationship between Paul and the Corinthian community.

<sup>257</sup> Beverly Gaventa, 'Apostle and Church in 2 Corinthians', in *1 & 2 Corinthians*, vol. 2 of *Pauline Theology*, ed. David Hay (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 194.

But there is a second theological variable that pushes even deeper into the connection between the Corinthians' pains and Paul's weakness. In its broadest sense, a paradox is defined, in the ancient and modern worlds, as a surprising occurrence that is contrary to one's experience.<sup>258</sup> In their work on the theological dimensions of the strength in weakness paradox, both Hotze and Heckel note its deeply transcendent, otherworldly qualities.<sup>259</sup> For instance, it is given to the apostle as a divine solution for his struggle with the thorn in the flesh (12.7-10). As such, it bears the capacity to provide solutions where human resilience fails. This seems especially evident during Paul's affliction in Asia (1.8-11), where it is only after he 'despaired of life itself' (v. 8) that he receives rescue and learns to depend upon 'the God who raises the dead' (v. 9). Whatever problem the paradox responds to, it is likely one that is deeply troubling, even seemingly unsolvable by human standards. This is simply not the case in Paul's debate with the opponents, which presents as a straightforward struggle for authority in Corinth (e.g. 11.1-6). So it makes sense to conclude that the primary target of the paradox is actually a deeper, more interpersonal problem: the community's struggle with pain.

The suggestion that the community's struggle with pain is extremely difficult, and thus requires divine intervention in the form of a paradox, is confirmed by the widespread recognition amongst interpreters that λύπη was a deeply negative emotion in antiquity.<sup>260</sup> In fact, Welborn states that 'among the Stoics, and those who, like Cicero and Seneca, sought to combine Stoic teaching with Platonic psychology, λύπη (Latin *aegritudo*) was the most problematic emotion.'<sup>261</sup> The Stoics believed that a wise person could avoid

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<sup>258</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Paradoxa Stoicorum*, ed. A.G. Lee (London: MacMillan & Co., 1953), ix; Plank, 'Paradoxical,' 127–36 [131]; Larry J Waters, 'Paradoxes in the Pauline Epistles,' *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167, no. 668 (October 2010): 423–41 [424–25].

<sup>259</sup> See sec. III.ii of Ch. 5.

<sup>260</sup> See p. 37–38 above.

<sup>261</sup> Welborn, 'Pain', 562.



negative emotions and experience their positive counterparts, known as 'good feelings' (εὐπάθειαι). But there was no corresponding εὐπάθεια for λύπη in Stoic thought.<sup>262</sup> Epictetus likewise indicates that the wise man is never subject to 'pain' (λύπη), only the 'fool' (ἄφρων).<sup>263</sup> Among those who were not distinctly Stoic, Dio Chrysostom states, 'What more abject creature is there than a man who is held in thrall to pain [ἄνδρὸς λυπουμένου]? What sight is there so shameful [αἰσχρός]?'<sup>264</sup> He goes on to suggest that an individual experiencing λύπη undergoes a 'disturbance of mind' that causes a 'distorted body' and 'dejected posture'.<sup>265</sup> Stobaeus asserts that λύπη causes one's soul (ψυχή) to shrink.<sup>266</sup> In Sirach 30.23, pain is an irredeemable experience: 'Remove pain [λύπη] far from you, for pain [λύπη] has destroyed many, and no advantage ever comes from it'. Although antiquity lacked a concept akin to the modern understanding of depression, Harris nominates λύπη as its closest possible equivalent.<sup>267</sup>

The assigning of a deeply troubling meaning to λυπ- words is confirmed in the New Testament, where λύπη is used to mark only the most serious grievances (e.g. Jn 16.20-22; Rom. 14.15; 1 Pt. 2.19). For instance, when Jesus is in Gethsemane, he feels λύπη in anticipation of the cross (Mt 26.37-8). In recognition of the terror associated with λύπη, Origen is concerned that Jesus's experience gives too much ground to Arian doctrine—no one would expect a divine being to experience λύπη!<sup>268</sup> Paul uses λύπη to express his anguish for Jews who have rejected Christ and await divine judgment (Rom. 9.2), or to describe how he would have mourned for Epaphratus (Phil. 2.27). In short, the apostle's

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid. Also Margaret Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 54.

<sup>263</sup> *Diss.* 2.22.6-7. Also see Cicero *Tusc. Disp.* 4.6.14.

<sup>264</sup> *Or.* 16.1.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 16.1-2.

<sup>266</sup> *Ecl.* 2.7.10b.

<sup>267</sup> William V. Harris, *Restraining Rage: The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 16-17.

<sup>268</sup> *PG* 13, cols. 1741-42. See Graver, *Emotion*, 106 for further discussion.

perception that the Corinthians are experiencing λύπη must be taken with the utmost seriousness. This is a hopeless, ensnaring emotion that cannot be easily solved. So it makes a great deal of theological sense to suggest that Paul's construction of a strength in weakness paradox infused by God's grace—a force originating outside of humanity (2 Cor. 12.9)—is the only construct capable of addressing the Corinthians' pains. The community must be pulled out of their existential crisis, an almost bipolar existence in which they display evidence of both weakness (2.1-7; 7.5-16) and strength (10.10; 13.9). In this sense, the paradox of strength in weakness is Paul's attempt to recover and renew the Corinthians' identity.

#### e. Conclusion

I began this sub-section by reviewing passages in antiquity where both λυπ- and ἄσθεν- words are used, which suggested that Paul places these terms in either a *causal* or *archetype-type* relationship. This led to an investigation of Paul's suffering vocabulary in 2 Corinthians, where an intuitive sense of 'lexical cohesion' is established through the repeated use of suffering terms that express human deprivation and struggle (e.g. θλίψις, θάνατος, πάθημα). Not only do λυπ- and ἄσθεν- words share this meaning, they are incorporated into a set of paired opposites that span the material comprising 2 Corinthians. By way of these pairings, the two word groups have a shared synonym—θλίψις. All of this suggests that the Corinthians' pains and Paul's weakness are semantically similar and, given the interchangeability of Paul's suffering terms, the community would have looked to his use of ἄσθεν- terms to consider how his weakness relates to theirs. Most importantly, Paul's ἄσθεν- terms represent a summative concept: after describing various sufferings in 11.21-29, the apostle states, 'Who is weak [ἄσθενέω] and I am not weak [ἄσθενέω]?' This suggests that the climactic δυν- and ἄσθεν- pairing is conceptually broad and incorporates

a variety of word groups. Weakness relates to humility, incompetence, and vulnerability, whereas strength communicates confidence, competence, and resilience. This breadth of meaning suggests that pain is a *type* of weakness.

There are also theological rationales for envisioning a connection between the Corinthians' pains and Paul's weakness. First, although the community is rebelling against Paul, he views them as believers (13.5). He shares in 'Christ's sufferings' and the community experiences 'the same sufferings' (1.5-6). By virtue of their shared identification with Christ, Paul's experience is applicable to the Corinthians. Finally, the Corinthians' experience of λύπη is one of the most troubling emotions in antiquity, even being comparable to depression. In the New Testament, it is reserved for only the most incorrigible emotions (e.g. Mt 26.37-8; Rom. 9.2). This suggests that a solution must lie outside of the Corinthians. Paul likewise uses ὁσθεν- terminology to express his experience of a paradox that is widely regarded as the intervention of divine reality amidst human suffering. The paradox appears less directed to the 'opponents'—a straightforward struggle for authority in Corinth—and more to the whole community's experience of pains. Paul does not explicitly label the Corinthians' 'pains' as 'weakness' to avoid adding insult to injury and, in light of Welborn's work, to follow the ancient convention of pursuing reconciliation.

All of the above reveals that Paul's λυπ- and ὁσθεν- terms, especially the latter, are an intricate masterstroke of rhetoric and argumentation. The strength in weakness discourses not only have the potential to address the accusations of the Corinthian community (10.10), they also subtly speak to the Corinthians' experience of weakness (2.1-7; 7.5-16). This opens the door to a *deeper paradigmatic reading* of the strength in weakness discourses in which the Corinthians, occupying a similar position to their weak

apostle, are addressed through the paradigm of Paul's own experiences. It only remains to be seen which discourses clearly address the Corinthians and what effects might be envisioned for the community.

*ii. The Corinthians' Polarity of Strength or Weakness*

Despite the evidence suggesting that the Corinthians' pains are a type of weakness, thus portraying the community as strong *and* weak, one could dismiss this reading as implausible. Strength and weakness are opposites, making it rather strange that both would characterize the same community. One could argue that this is the result of different factions in Corinth, but that is not the claim being made here.<sup>269</sup> Paul indicates that the entire community is experiencing pain (2 Cor. 2.5), and he routinely implies that the community is proud by holding them responsible for the rebellious actions of the opponents (11.4-6; 12.11). Another solution is to suggest that the Corinthians are more docile within 1.1-2.13; 7.1-2, 5-16 as this is a separate document known as the 'conciliatory letter', which was written after the difficult stages of the conflict.<sup>270</sup> But this still does not explain why single passages attest contradictions in the Corinthian experience: Paul's letters have the potential to 'frighten' the Corinthians, yet they think the apostle is 'weak' (10.9); the community is excessively punishing the offender, but they remain troubled by pain (2.5-7). Is there a social mechanism that explains this complex dynamic in the Corinthian community?

The most basic social context of the ancient world is its honour/shame dynamics, and many interpreters have argued that Corinth was especially affected by these

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<sup>269</sup> See sec. II.ii of Ch. 5 for further discussion of this issue.

<sup>270</sup> For more on this explanation, see p. 76-83 below.

variables.<sup>271</sup> The Corinthians are boastful (3.1; 10.15), rebellious (10.10; 11.2-6), and seemingly self-sufficient (6.11-13; 12.11-15), suggesting that they feel validated in their attainment of honour. But the harbouring of shame cannot be ruled out. Williams rightly stresses that shame is 'being seen, inappropriately, by the wrong people, in the wrong condition'.<sup>272</sup> This seems to occur for the supposedly stronger Corinthians as Paul, their weak apostle, writes the painful letter and elicits negative emotions, even convicting the Corinthians of wrongdoing (cf. 7.8-9). This was the 'visual assassination' of the Corinthian community at the altar of their own expectations and those of their culture.<sup>273</sup> The Corinthians' shame is confirmed by Paul's use of λυπ- words. In antiquity, shame often accompanied experiences of pain (λύπη).<sup>274</sup> Aristotle remarks, 'Let shame [αἰσχύνη] be defined as pain [λύπη] or disturbance [ταραχή] in regard to bad things...which seem liable to discredit us'.<sup>275</sup> Dio Chrysostom states, 'What more abject creature is there than a man who is held in thrall to pain [ἄνδρὸς λυπουμένου]? What sight is there so shameful [αἰσχρὸς]?'<sup>276</sup> Paul himself connects shame with his own experience of weakness (of which pain is a type): 'To my shame [αἰσχύνη], we were too weak [ἄσθενέω] for that!' (2 Cor. 11.21). Elsewhere he compares his whole apostolic existence with the Corinthians' perception of themselves: 'We are weak [ἄσθενής], but you are strong [ἰσχυρός]. You are held in honour [ἔνδοξος], but we are in disrepute [ἄτιμος]' (1 Cor. 4.10b).<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> E.g. Savage, *Weakness*, 54-99; S. Scott Bartchy, "'When I'm Weak, I'm Strong": A Pauline Paradox in Cultural Context,' in *Kultur, Politik, Religion, Sprache. Wolfgang Stegemann zum 60.*, Kontexte der Schrift 2 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2005), 49-60 [49-51]; Pickett, *Cross*, 170-76.

<sup>272</sup> Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 78.

<sup>273</sup> Barton, *Honor*, 248.

<sup>274</sup> See e.g. Plato *Leg.* 9.862; Plutarch *Alex.* 70, *Amat.* 4, *Demetr.* 27; Euripides *Hipp.* 1330-40; Xenophon *Cyr.* 6.1.35; Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 31.153; Josephus *A.J.* 12.179. See Graver, *Emotions*, 206-10 for further discussion.

<sup>275</sup> *Rhet.* 2.6.

<sup>276</sup> *Or.* 16.1

<sup>277</sup> The term ἄτιμος refers to a lack of honour (i.e. shame) rather than shame itself.

Although these passages do not prove that shame *necessarily* accompanies pain, each attests a connection sufficient to conclude that the specific pains of the Corinthians—bitterness, heartbreak, and despair—would have brought shame, especially given the community's obsession with self-commendation (3.1-3) and good appearance (10.10). This connection is helpful for explaining the community's odd behaviour because, as Barton notes, an experience of shame can function as the *animus* of one's pursuit of honour.<sup>278</sup> Malina likewise observes, 'For a person in a society concerned with honour...there is a thinking back and forth, between the norms of society and how the person is to reproduce those norms in specific behaviour.'<sup>279</sup> In other words, it is often those falling into disrepute who—as a result of their inadequacies—desperately try to re-gain their honour. Horace states, 'Glory drags along the lowly no less than the highly-born, bound in chains to her resplendent chariot'.<sup>280</sup> A complex of shame and vigorous claims to honour is made all the more likely in Corinth by two factors. First, Roman Corinth had a disproportionate number of former slaves, leading to what Witherington calls 'a self-made-person-escapes-humble-origins syndrome'.<sup>281</sup> In their former life, the Corinthians are likewise described as lacking wisdom, power, and noble birth (1 Cor. 1.26). But now that they have gained a sense of status (e.g. 1 Cor. 4.8; 2 Cor. 3.1-2, 11.1-6), they will not surrender it easily. They possess theological motivation to climb out of their pain and shame through their interest in 'another Jesus [ἄλλον Ἰησοῦν]' (11.4), who is advocated by the opponents (v. 5-6) and is thus identified with the strong, not the weak.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Barton, *Honor*, 12, 202-243. Also see J. E. Lendon, *Empire of Honour: The Art of Government in the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 30-106.

<sup>279</sup> Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 31.

<sup>280</sup> *Sat.* 1.6.23-24. Also see Cicero, *Fin.*, 5.22.61 and Aulus Gellius, *Noct. Att.*, 10.3.7.

<sup>281</sup> Witherington, *Corinthians*, 20-21.

<sup>282</sup> I recognize that there is some debate regarding the meaning of ἄλλον Ἰησοῦν (11.4), especially when read in light of the 'other spirit' (v. 4b) and 'other gospel' phrases (v. 4c). However, I follow the majority of interpreters who, in commenting upon the Christological dimension of the Corinthians' rebellion,

The result of these dynamics in the community is a deep sense of instability: the Corinthians are, at the hands of a weak Paul, losing their sense of honour through his moral correction and continued influence over the community (2.1-7; 7.5-16). As the Corinthians struggle with their pains, they lash out at the apostle who, in their view, is the cause of all their problems. Barton summarizes, 'Profound and inexpiable shame made one feel "pinned"—self-absorbed, but also, since one's *persona* was broken, empty, *inanis*, without being. Excessive shame produced an extreme and insupportable self-consciousness...which in turn spawned a deep hatred of those who made one ashamed.'<sup>283</sup> Consequently, the community is stuck in a cycle of shame mixed with desperate attempts to be strong. They view strength and weakness only as *opposed* entities, and thus embody a *polarity* of strength or weakness, oscillating back and forth between these two experiences almost simultaneously. They feel defeated and, amidst experiences of despair, they rebel against Paul in an effort to redeem their sense of self before being brought down again by their pain.<sup>284</sup> In this sense, their experience is reminiscent of what one might call bipolarism.

#### a. A Synopsis of the Situation in Corinth

In one sense, there is little in which my presentation differs from prevailing views on the situation. Given Paul's cognitive view of the emotions (e.g. Rom. 12.2-12; 1 Thess. 4.13-18), the Corinthians' pains should not be viewed as isolated phenomena, but experiences that are influenced by the judgments about Paul's ministry which feature so

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conclude that this Jesus was an impressive, honourable figure. See e.g. Georgi, *Opponents*, 170-71; Martin, *Corinthians*, 341; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, 'Another Jesus (2 Cor. 11.4),' *RB* 97 (1990): 238-51 [249-50].

<sup>283</sup> Barton, *Honor*, 264. Also see Léon Wurmser, *The Mask of Shame* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 43, 50, 53, 55, 69. Erving Goffman, 'Embarrassment and Social Organization,' *American Journal of Sociology* 62, no. 3 (1956): 264-71 [267] captures the manic nature of the Corinthians' downward spiral: 'There seems to be a critical point at which the flustered individual gives up trying to conceal or play down his uneasiness: he collapses into tears or paroxysms of laughter, has a temper tantrum, flies into blind rage, faints, dashes to the nearest exit, or becomes rigidly immobile as when in a panic.'

<sup>284</sup> Lendon, *Honor*, 51 observes that, for a shamed person with few avenues to vindicate themselves, they may go public with 'shouted abuse...anonymous lampoons and verses, anonymous gossip, and...slander.' Although the Corinthians are not anonymous in their slander of Paul, one cannot help but see a connection between this kind of abuse and the Corinthians' slander.

prominently in current work on the situation.<sup>285</sup> The apostle is responding to a community that openly questions his authority by accusing him of being unreliable (1.19-22), having a poor appearance and inadequate preaching ability (10.10; 11.6), and above all, being weak (10.10; 11.21; 13.9). But each of these issues is now stained with pain due to Paul's previous visit and letter (2.1-7). The community's 'godly grief' (7.5-16) is a limited sense of remorse that produces the offender's punishment, but this act itself is the cause of ongoing heartbreak as the majority struggles to complete this act (2.6). The offender experiences despair (2.7) and the community, being reprimanded by their weak apostle, is embittered towards him (2.1-2, 4-5).

The Corinthians' pains are of special concern because they tarnish the community's sense of self with experiences that they only associate with their apostle: they now embody the weak. The community's experience of λύπη is similar to the modern understanding of depression. But fuelled by their honour/shame context, they appear to be using their brokenness and suffering as motivation to rebel against Paul and re-claim their sense of superiority. This desire is intensified by the community's interest in 'another Jesus' (11.4), who is advocated by the opponents, and associates with the strong rather than the weak. Although Paul views the community as believers (13.5), he recognizes that their pain so deeply troubles them that it is a major stumbling block to enacting reconciliation (2.1-7).

The above suggests that the Corinthian situation is altogether more complex than previously thought. The community embodies the strong *or* the weak in the sense that they are caught in an unstable polarity, oscillating between despair and the uncontrolled pride necessary to recover from being weak like Paul. This means that the opponents and their obsessive quest for honour are helpful to the Corinthians' attempted recovery (e.g. 10.10),

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<sup>285</sup> See sec. I of Ch. 1. For more on Paul's cognitive view of the emotions, see e.g. Elliot, *Emotions*, 240-55; Barton, 'Emotions', 587-88; Jew, 'Regime', 1-5.



but are not a wholly independent problem for Paul to address.<sup>286</sup> The issue lies *within the Corinthians themselves*, specifically their belief that weakness is antithetical to strength and especially the experiences of pain that accompany this conviction. Although they fail to realize it, the community is built upon a foundation of weakness and, in its attempts to change, it has coated its brick and mortar with a thin veneer of strength. Without an ability to incorporate their troubling experiences into the course of their life together, they risk a total de-stabilization of their behaviour that results in a rejection of Jesus *via* their rejection of Paul (11.1-6; 13.1-5). The connections established above between the Corinthians' pains and Paul's weakness suggest that the apostle's strategy is to address the community's struggle by referring to his own experiences of weakness. With little time and even less certainty of success, Paul prepares a solution that transcends the Corinthians' human creativity: the strength in weakness paradox.

### *iii. Re-considering the Literary Integrity Problem*

It was noted earlier that a key conversation within the prevailing research paradigm concerns the question of literary integrity. Interpreters such as Georgi, Bornkamm, and Betz have routinely puzzled over places where Paul's tone dramatically shifts, often accompanied by a break in the argument (e.g. 7.5; 10.1).<sup>287</sup> The effects of the prevailing paradigm are evident in partition theories which assert that 2 Corinthians is a series of letters identifiable by the magnitude of the conflict: 2.14-7.4 (an early, subtle apology); 10.1-13.14 (the harsh, painful letter); 1.1-2.13, 7.5-16 (a later, reconciliatory letter). On the other hand, it is increasingly common amongst scholars like Witherington and Long to assert the unity of 2 Corinthians based on a set of rhetorical plays that run through the

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<sup>286</sup> This suggestion will be discussed further in sec. II.i-ii of Ch. 5.

<sup>287</sup> See sec. I of Ch. 1.

material.<sup>288</sup> But such theories still work within the confines of the apologetic paradigm by interpreting Paul's approach as a harsh dealing with rebellious Corinthians. This means that the conclusions reached above regarding the Corinthians' ongoing pains have implications for both partition and unity theories: the community is far more complex than previously envisioned. As such, a fuller engagement with the integrity problem is required to determine whether current theories can account for a community trapped in a polarity of strength or weakness.

Before an evaluation can occur, two variables must be considered. The first concerns the seemingly arbitrary nature of arguments relating to the composition of 2 Corinthians. While there have been many contributions to this sub-field, many have ventured a conclusion that resembles a guess rather than a reasoned conclusion.<sup>289</sup> As Barrett comments, 'The field is one in which theories are more numerous than facts, and clear distinctions between the two are not always made.'<sup>290</sup> This may tempt one to suggest that the manuscript evidence should be totally determinative: the earliest manuscripts of Paul's letters, including P46, contain a unified 2 Corinthians.<sup>291</sup> Even Plummer, a partitionist, concedes that if one stands against his work by citing external evidence then one has found 'solid ground.'<sup>292</sup> However, the manuscript evidence is not a 'trump card' because one still needs to explain the troubling internal evidence that sees Paul, among other things, praising the community at one moment (e.g. 7.5-16) and reprimanding them

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> So Hans Dieter Betz, *Corinthians*, 9: 'As one reads the many contributions to the debate, the complete lack of methodological reflection becomes more and more irritating....' In Niels Hyldahl, 'Die Frage Nach Der Literarischen Einheit Des Zweiten Korintherbriefes,' *ZNW* 64, no. 3-4 (1973): 289- 306, it is argued that the debate is a creation of scholarship rather than a reflection of the difficulties in the text. He suggests the debate would cease if scholars simply accepted that some of the Corinthian correspondence is lost (p. 306).

<sup>290</sup> Barrett, *Corinthians*, 5.

<sup>291</sup> See Philip Comfort and David P. Barrett, eds., *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 2001), 203-334.

<sup>292</sup> Plummer, *Corinthians*, xxxvi.

at the next (e.g. 11.7-21). This suggests that the lack of a single manuscript supporting partitions simply shifts the *burden of proof* to partitionists, who must respond with a watertight case based upon the internal evidence.

The second variable to bear in mind concerns the strength of the solution being sought for the integrity problem in 2 Corinthians. Given the staggering amount of literature on this issue, it is necessary to evaluate competing theories with a dose of modesty.<sup>293</sup> This is especially the case for my project, where the focus of research is how Paul uses the strength in weakness paradox to respond to the Corinthians' pains. But the need to avoid harsh criticism is dictated by more than my focus; rather, the nature of the exercise involves gathering circumstantial evidence to make a claim about a composition process that one has not witnessed. Consequently, I propose to search, not for a conclusive answer to the integrity problem, but one which honours the need for modesty and rests on sound evidence. In other words, I will evaluate theories to determine which one offers the *least implausible* solution.

#### a. Partition Theories

When Semler inaugurated critical study of 2 Corinthians, his concern was the literary break at 10.1: 'I myself, Paul, appeal to you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ....' Here the apostle appears to begin his argument again, suggesting that 2 Corinthians 10-13 is a unique, later letter.<sup>294</sup> This theory was re-introduced for the twentieth century by Windisch, who suggested that the 'differences in tone and attitude' in chs. 10-13 demand an explanation.<sup>295</sup> Paul appears only slightly antagonistic in chs. 1-7 (e.g. 1.19-20; 3.1-2), but in chs. 10-13 he becomes deeply bombastic (e.g. 10.12; 11.1-4).

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<sup>293</sup> See the history of interpretation in Vegge, *Reconciliation*, 7-34.

<sup>294</sup> Johann Solomo Semler, *Paraphrasis II: Epistulae Ad Corinthios* (Halle: Hemmerde, 1776).

<sup>295</sup> Windisch, *Korintherbrief*, 15.

The best explanation appears to be that these two sets of material were written on different occasions.<sup>296</sup> This hypothesis was developed by Hausrath and Kennedy, the former noting that the 'changed tone' and 'quite different mental state' possessed by Paul in chs. 10-13 suggests that this is the earlier painful letter identified in 2.1-4.<sup>297</sup> The material matches Paul's description of the painful letter, which was written 'out of much affliction, and anguish of heart' (2.4) and the apostle expresses himself so strongly that he felt the need to repent (7.8).<sup>298</sup> Kennedy expands upon Hausrath by clarifying that chs. 10-13 should not be viewed as the entirety of the painful letter but only the concluding portion—the rest was removed by a redactor.<sup>299</sup> More recently, Watson and Welborn have tried to resolve what they deem to be the greatest problem with this theory: chs. 10-13 discuss the Corinthians' rebellion rather openly whereas chs. 1-2, 7 (esp. 2.1-7; 7.5-16) are very cautious regarding the community's wrongdoing.<sup>300</sup> Welborn concludes that 1.1-2.13; 7.5-16 is a separate conciliatory letter and, in antiquity, such letters utilized the 'deliberate forgetfulness' of the offence to avoid offending the party with whom they wished to reconcile.<sup>301</sup>

One can certainly perceive the advantages of adopting a partition theory that identifies chs. 10-13 with Paul's painful letter and 1.1-2.13; 7.5-16 with a later, conciliatory work. It offers a close reading of the text that is sensitive to the nuances of Paul's tone and argument. Furthermore, it takes seriously the break in Paul's argument at 10.1, rather than inventing a variety of unlikely theories which, as will be seen below, have been created in

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Hausrath, *Vier-Capitel-Brief*, 1-2. Reimund Bieringer, 'Teilungshypothesen zum 2. Korintherbrief. Ein Forschungsüberblick,' in *Studies on 2 Corinthians*, ed. Reimund Bieringer and Jan Lambrecht, BETL, CXII (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 67–105 [73-80] provides a comprehensive list of scholars who support this position.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 79-94.

<sup>299</sup> James Houghton Kennedy, *The Second and Third Epistles of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Methuen & Co., 1900), xv.

<sup>300</sup> Watson, 'Corinthians,' 324-25 and Welborn, 'Identification,' 138-45.

<sup>301</sup> Welborn, 'Identification,' 151-53.

support of unity.<sup>302</sup> However, the above theories are not without difficulties. Each imagines a redactor who brings various manuscripts together to form 2 Corinthians. Although no such redactor is evident in the manuscripts, these theories even envision this individual removing certain parts of an original letter (i.e. chs. 10-13) to form the present unity. This simply multiplies the number of unattested textual incisions needed to support this view.

A final partition theory initiated by Schmithals in the mid-twentieth century is a considerable expansion upon the Hausrath-Kennedy hypothesis. Schmithals notes the 'special character' of 2 Corinthians 10-13 that makes Hausrath's thesis 'simply compelling'.<sup>303</sup> Schmithals treats 1.1-2.13, 7.5-16 as a unit because he believes this is a letter of reconciliation which Paul writes not long before arriving in Corinth for his third visit. Schmithals claims that this section displays a 'fundamentally different character' than 2.14-6.13, 7.2-4, which focuses on the differences between Paul and the Corinthians with subtle references to an opposing party (e.g. 3.1).<sup>304</sup> 2.14-6.13, 7.2-4 differs from the painful letter of chs. 10-13 because its critique is veiled, while the painful letter contains a 'vigorous tone'.<sup>305</sup> So Schmithals concludes that 2.14-6.13, 7.2-4 precedes the painful letter, the painful letter (chs. 10-13) is written once the conflict has peaked, and 1.1-2.13, 7.5-16 is written during the conflict's resolution.<sup>306</sup> This thesis has been advocated by, among others, Bornkamm, Mitchell, and Betz.<sup>307</sup>

Despite the increased sensitivity to Paul's varying tone, Schmithals' theory hardly seems to improve the plausibility of the partition theories surveyed above. In fact, its

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<sup>302</sup> See p. 81-83 below.

<sup>303</sup> Schmithals, *Gnosticism*, 96.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>306</sup> The full list of Schmithals' partitions, and those of his followers, is as follows: 1.1-2.13, 7.5-16; 2.14-6.13, 7.2-4; 6.14-7.1; 8.1-24; 9.1-15; 10.1-13.13.

<sup>307</sup> See e.g. Betz, 'Corinthians', 1148-54; Bornkamm, 'Corinthians', 258-61; Mitchell, *Hermeneutics*, 7.

conclusion is rendered even more implausible by increasing the number of partitions and thus requiring more unattested textual incisions (or redactors) to explain the composition of 2 Corinthians. More importantly, Schmithals has turned rich material—which responds to a community that exhibits both strength and weakness (e.g. 2.1-7; cf. 10.10, 11.1-4)—into a set of letters that conform to a single purpose and reach an altogether predictable conclusion. If one accepts my parsing of  $\lambda\upsilon\pi$ - words, the 'letter of reconciliation' that supposedly ends the conflict actually contains observations of present pain within the community (e.g. 2.1-4; 1.3-7). Furthermore, the letter characterized by veiled critique sometimes seems heartbroken and direct (e.g. 6.11-13; 5.18-21). Even the supposed 'painful letter' contains at least a hint of consolation when Paul clarifies that he aims to 'build up' the community (12.19). In short, partition theories project in black and white what needs to be seen in colour: the provenance of the material composing 2 Corinthians appears complex, as is the material itself, and these facts have not been sufficiently considered when explaining the composition process.

#### b. Unity Theories

One of the most recent unity theories comes from Land, who utilizes Systematic Functional Linguistics to argue that 2 Corinthians is a unity centered upon Paul's absence from the community and his desire that they not abandon him for different leadership.<sup>308</sup> On the other hand, Long draws upon ancient rhetoric to note parallels between Paul's apology and, among others, Isocrates's *Antidosis*: both authors defend themselves against criticism, commend their teaching, and correct misunderstandings.<sup>309</sup> This suggests that the key literary breaks within 2 Corinthians, such as 2.4 and 10.1, are explained by ancient

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<sup>308</sup> Christopher D. Land, *The Integrity of 2 Corinthians and Paul's Aggravating Absence*, New Testament Monographs 36 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015), 79.

<sup>309</sup> Long, *Apology*, 112-113.

conventions of rhetoric—they are transitions to the letter's *probatio* and *refutatio* respectively.<sup>310</sup> Long maintains that the material is unified by the argument that 'since God approved [Paul's] ministry, so should the Corinthians.'<sup>311</sup> Other theories focus on specific problems, such as the break at 10.1, where a sleepless night or a pause in the writing are proposed to explain Paul's considerable adjustment of tact and tone.<sup>312</sup>

A more prominent unity theory utilizes the work of Olson, who argued that Paul's expressions of confidence in his communities are actually hortatory devices intended to boost the morale of his addressees.<sup>313</sup> This suggestion has been developed by Vegge, who surveys writers such as Epictetus, Seneca and Dio Chrysostom before concluding that exaggerated praise was indeed a common strategy in antiquity.<sup>314</sup> Vegge believes this is significant for 2 Corinthians, where partition theories have abounded because scholars cannot make sense of the strange mix of reconciliation and conflict.<sup>315</sup> As seen above, the material is filled with references to conflict (2.17, 3.1, 11.18-23) and reconciliation (7.5-16) with a matching change of tone from joyful and optimistic (1.1-7, 7.5-16) to caustic and threatening (1.12-2.4, chs. 10-13). But these dynamics are not nearly as contradictory as they seem because, Vegge contends, 'Paul praises and amplifies the partial reconciliation that has occurred so as to exhort to full reconciliation.'<sup>316</sup> So the conflict between Paul and Corinth is the dominant dynamic within their relationship and Paul's discussion of realized reconciliation (i.e. 7.5-16) is, as Olson contended, largely a rhetorical device rather than a

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 232-33.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>312</sup> See esp. Hans Lietzmann, *An die Korinther I-II*, ed. W.G Kümmel (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1969), 139. These arguments are listed, for instance, as standard fare for unity theorists in 2 Corinthians by D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 269.

<sup>313</sup> Stanley Norris Olson, 'Confidence Expressions in Paul : Epistolary Conventions and the Purpose of 2 Corinthians' (Ph.D., Yale University, 1976). This was followed by: Olson, 'Epistolary', 585-97 and 'Confidence', 282-95.

<sup>314</sup> Vegge, *Reconciliation*, 50.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 32.

reflection of reality. This allows Vegge to conclude that the material comprising 2 Corinthians is united by its interest in reconciliation between apostle and community.<sup>317</sup>

Unity theories rightly note the common themes of 2 Corinthians—such as reconciliation—and they have the advantage of the manuscript evidence. But these interpreters suffer from the same tendency found in their counterparts by reducing the complex material of 2 Corinthians into a simple, predictable missive. This is most evident in Vegge's work, where a tension in the relationship between Paul and Corinth—the mixture of conflict and reconciliation—is essentially reduced to a mirage. Even a focus on unifying themes distracts from the reality that Paul's strength in weakness paradox is not reducible to one theme. It relates to Paul's defense (12.9-11), his desire for reconciliation (12.15), his relationship to Christ (12.9), and the Corinthians' weakness (1.3-7; 2.1-7; 12.19). In summary, unity theories appear, like partition theories, to make the material of 2 Corinthians rather simple when the evidence points to a more nuanced body of work.

### c. Conclusion

Consequently, my conclusion is that the current form of both partition and unity theories cannot adequately understand the material in 2 Corinthians because both options are too simple. These theories reduce what is otherwise complex material into a predictable narrative of missives that climax with reconciliation, or into a unified document predicated upon a single theme. None of these solutions can account for the situation outlined above in which the Corinthians oscillate between strength and weakness, leaving the apostle to respond to a bipolar community.<sup>318</sup> As a result, I am suspending the consideration of other theories and operating on the premise that the material is a unity (given that the burden of

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 389.

<sup>318</sup> See p. 71-76 above.



proof rests upon partitionists).<sup>319</sup> The exegetical analysis of selected passages in 2 Corinthians will afford the opportunity to further reflect upon the integrity problem, especially the unlikely coincidence that Paul's tone—the main variable at issue—oscillates throughout the material between confrontation (e.g. 1.12-2.4, chs. 10-13) and consolation (e.g. 1.1-7, 7.5-16) much like the community presents as both strong (e.g. 10.10; 11.1-5) and weak (e.g. 2.1-7). This raises the prospect of *unity through diversity*: the consistency of Paul's approach could be illuminated by a nuanced view of the situation that characterizes the community as two-sided. But is there any evidence that Paul adjusts his tone to address the polar ends of the Corinthian oscillation between strength and weakness? This question will be pursued in the following chapters not only in relation to the integrity debate, but also concerning the accuracy of my hypothesis that the Corinthians' pains are ongoing.

## V. Summary and Initial Hypotheses

The above section detailed several inter-related implications which flow from my argument that the Corinthians' pains of bitterness, despair, and heartbreak (2.1-7) have not concluded in remorse (7.5-16) and are thus likely to be *ongoing* as Paul pens 2 Corinthians. First, the Corinthians' pains were shown—from a semantic perspective—to be a kind of *weakness*. One is justified in reading Paul's strength in weakness discourses in light of the Corinthians' pains not only due to this conclusion, but also given the Corinthians' participation with Christ and their need for a theologically-rooted paradox due to the depth of distress implied by their λύπη. This led to a deeper reading of the Corinthians' situation given the connection between weakness and experiences of shame. The community is either strong or weak, oscillating between both realities and, like others in antiquity, their experience of weakness motivates their claims to strength. In short, they embody a

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<sup>319</sup> See p. 76-78 above.

'polarity'. Finally, this sketch of the situation led to a potentially new solution to the literary integrity problem: Paul's varying tone is driven, not by erratic reasoning or different situations, but by the community's polarity of strength or weakness. The apostle may be adjusting his tone to address the various sides of the community's erratic, complex experience.

When combined with my study of  $\lambda\upsilon\pi$ - words, these implications lead to the following hypotheses which will be tested, expanded, and nuanced over the course of my exegetical analysis of 2 Corinthians. They are as follows:

- 1) The Corinthians carry ongoing pains of despair, heartbreak, and bitterness (2.1-7; 7.5-16), which are actively preventing their reconciliation with Paul (2.1-2).
- 2) These pains form a narrative—the community's polarity—in which they oscillate between strength and weakness (2.1-7; 10.10). This does not occur over long periods of time, covering separate situations; rather, the community is deeply two-sided, showing vindictive strength against Paul yet struggling with pain. In fact, their pain subtly motivates their claims against the apostle. They take their experiences of strength and weakness to be totally opposed and irreconcilable.
- 3) Paul oscillates his tone to match the Corinthians' polarity, comforting them in their weakness and confronting them in their strength. The observations associated with this hypothesis will also serve to confirm the ongoing nature of the Corinthians' pains.
- 4) Paul's solution to the Corinthian situation lies in the strength in weakness paradox, which possesses a *transformative* function primarily through the relationship that it establishes between strength and weakness. This relationship is

intricate—what I will call *co-inherent*—and, in light of the depth of the Corinthians' pains, it is remarkable for how it *redeems* human weakness without rendering that weakness inherently redemptive.

5) In light of the complex nature of the Corinthian situation, which is centered on certain emotions but also includes troubling behaviours and knowledge, the paradox enacts *comprehensive personal transformation* that changes the community's identity, their knowledge of God and reality, their emotions, and behaviour. In particular, the paradox enables the ultimate act of strength in weakness: reconciliation with Paul.

Alongside of these claims are a variety of related questions, some of which will grow in importance over the course of the thesis. How might divine grace aid the Corinthians' pains? What does Paul dislike about the Corinthians' polarity of strength or weakness? Is there a Christological dimension to the paradox? How should one describe the final result of the Corinthians' transformation? And how does all of this relate to the apologetic paradigm that dominates research related to 2 Corinthians? I will begin to address these questions and the hypotheses above in the following chapter, where I trace Paul's initial formulations of strength in weakness.

## Chapter 3

### A Jarring Comfort: Evaluating the First Instances of the Paradox

#### I. An Overview of 2 Corinthians 1.3-11

'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies [οἰκτιρμός] and God of all comfort [παράκλησις]' (v. 3). So begins Paul's letter to the Corinthians, proclaiming God's comfort amidst human affliction. It is difficult to understand this remark and the verses that follow (esp. v. 4-7) in light of the current research paradigm, which attests that the community is rebellious and proud.<sup>320</sup> Even if one takes this passage to be the beginning of a reconciliatory letter that is sent after the conflict was resolved (i.e. 1.1-2.13; 7.1-2, 5-16), Paul still insists that he and the community are presently experiencing the 'same sufferings [αὐτῶν παθημάτων]' (1.6). This suggests that all is not well in Corinth! As discussed previously, the Corinthians view strength as the antithesis of weakness.<sup>321</sup> Their recent experience of pain (e.g. 2.1-7) has troubled them not least because they believe that they are spiritually superior to Paul (e.g. 10.10; 11.4). This background might explain why Paul understands the community to be suffering.<sup>322</sup> Regardless, Paul believes that the community is in need of encouragement, so he uses this opening salvo to announce a new theological horizon: a God who comforts the downcast. The Corinthians receive comfort in their affliction (v. 6a)—and so does their supposedly inferior apostle (v. 4b). Nonetheless, Paul is not trying to stir controversy. His tone is consolatory given the use of παράκλησις and παρακαλέω ('comfort' and 'to comfort').<sup>323</sup> The apostle says, '[God] comforts [ὁ παρακαλῶν] us in all our affliction, so that we may be

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<sup>320</sup> See sec. I of Ch. 1.

<sup>321</sup> See sec. IV.ii of Ch. 2.

<sup>322</sup> This possibility will be discussed further on p. 92-94 below.

<sup>323</sup> These terms can also mean 'exhortation' or 'to exhort', but they are used in v. 3-7 as a balm for suffering. See e.g. 1 Cor. 14.3, 2 Cor. 7.4-6, and Philem. 7. Also see 'παρακαλέω', BDAG (3rd ed.), 764-65.

able to comfort [παρακαλεῖν] those who are in every affliction' (v. 4). Paul's ministry relays comfort, but this comfort is ultimately God's.<sup>324</sup> He is rich in his stores of comfort and makes Paul 'victorious through heavenly consolation.'<sup>325</sup> But that victory does not leave suffering behind. Paul is conspicuous in what he does not say: God comforts without removing affliction (i.e. ἐν ὑπομονῇ [v. 6b]).

Alary makes the tantalizing suggestion that the comfort experienced by Paul is the same as that of the Jewish prophets who envisioned future restoration while they suffered for God's people.<sup>326</sup> She cites prophetic commands that bear resemblance to 1.3-7—such as 'comfort (παρακαλάσατε) one another' (LXX Is. 35.4)—to conclude that Paul stands in the tradition of the prophets.<sup>327</sup> Hofius suggests that Paul's consolation motif derives especially from the Psalms, including Psalm 23—'sie trösten mich [αὐταί με παρεκάλεσαν]'.<sup>328</sup> Wherever Paul's language originates, he is not explicit about his source(s). He does, however, consider God's comfort to be appropriate for opening a letter that is the latest entry in the ongoing firestorm between the apostle and the Corinthians. So one should conclude with Garland: '[Comfort] is not some tranquilizing dose of grace that only dulls pains but a stiffening agent that fortifies one in heart, mind, and soul. Comfort relates to encouragement [and] help.'<sup>329</sup> Yet it remains unclear who—Paul or the Corinthians—is supposed to benefit most from this help. An answer requires a close inspection of the relational transactions in v. 3-7 as the comfort moves outward from the Father of 'mercies [οἰκτιρμῶν]' and God of 'all comfort [πάσης παρακλήσεως]' (v. 3b) to Paul (v. 4a) and then

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<sup>324</sup> See p. 89-91 below.

<sup>325</sup> Calvin, *Corinthians*, II:111.

<sup>326</sup> Laura Dawn Alary, 'Good Grief: Paul as Sufferer and Consoler in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7: A Comparative Investigation'. (Ph.D., St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, 2003), 307.

<sup>327</sup> Alary, 'Grief', 297.

<sup>328</sup> Otfried Hofius, "'Der Gott Allen Trostes". Παράκλησις Und Παρακαλεῖν in 2 Kor 1,3-7', in *Paulusstudien*, WUNT 51 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 251.

<sup>329</sup> Garland, *Corinthians*, 60. The meaning of 'comfort' is bound up with the meaning of οἰκτιρμός given that the latter is coordinated with παράκλησις—'the Father of *mercies* and God of all *comfort*' (v. 3). It adds to the emphasis on consolation as it often refers to sympathy or compassion (e.g. Rom. 12.1, Phil. 2.1).

to the Corinthians (v. 4b). The following sub-section considers this movement, and especially how the structure of Paul's argument reveals his agenda in v. 3-11.

## II. Considering Paul's Purpose in 1.3-11

### *i. A Crescendo of Comfort (v. 3-7)*

The movement of comfort in 1.3-4 has caused many commentators to describe these verses using a 'God-Paul-Corinthians' model wherein Paul is the unique conduit between God and the Corinthians.<sup>330</sup> This suggests that Paul and his apostleship are not the focus of 1.3-11.<sup>331</sup> Although it is true that these verses, especially v. 4, envision the apostle as a bridge between God and community, there is a structure to Paul's argument that often goes unnoticed. As the chart below demonstrates, the flow of thought in v. 3b-4 is *chiastic* rather than *linear*.



After descending from God to himself and then to the Corinthians in v. 3b-4a, Paul ascends back through this chain of relationships in v. 4b. This sequence suggests that the initial

<sup>330</sup> See e.g. Alasury Innasimuthu, 'Comfort in Affliction: An Exegetical Study of 2 Corinthians 1,3-11' (Ph.D., KU Leuven, 1995), 11; Harris, *Corinthians*, 140-41; Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 60; Alary, 'Grief', 1-43.

<sup>331</sup> This is certainly the case for the interpreters listed above. A minority of scholars believe the prologue, 1.3-11, should be split in two—v. 3-7 (prologue) and v. 8-11 (a part of the travel narrative in 1.12-2.17). In support of my decision to treat these passages together (but with varying rationales), see e.g. Thomas Schmeller, *Der Zweite Brief an Die Korinther*, vol. 1, 2 vols., KEK, 2/8 (Zürich: Patmos-Verlag, 2010), 44-45; Innasimuthu, 'Comfort', 271-72; Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 13. I further explore this issue on p. 95-96 below.

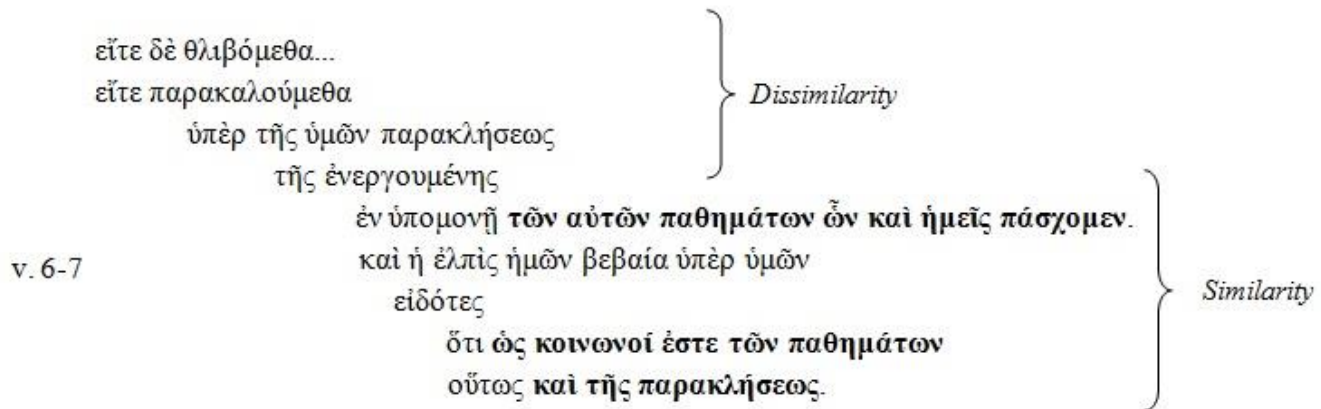
emphasis in v. 3-4 lies on God (in bold above) as the supplier of comfort to both Paul and the Corinthians. There is an outward movement of comfort—an alien comfort—to which Paul cannot lay claim. One could argue that the second point of emphasis in v. 3-4 lies with the underlined text in the middle of the chart: the Corinthians share Paul's comfort in every affliction (θλίψις). Therefore, not only does the sequence within v. 3-4 shift the emphasis away from Paul, it recognizes that both the apostle and the community are dependent upon God for comfort in weakness.<sup>332</sup> My proposed emphasis on God's ministry is supported by the distinctive nature of the thanksgiving—Paul forgoes a discussion of his joy or hope with respect to the community (cf. Rom. 1.7-16; 1 Th. 1.2-10). Instead, he begins by praising God: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' (v. 3).

In v. 6-7, Paul's interest in the Corinthians comes into greater focus. The apostle's unique role as a conduit between God and community persists briefly while he describes the sufferings of his ministry: 'If we are afflicted, it is for your [ὑμῶν] comfort' (v. 6a). But this gives way to mutuality as Paul crescendos with the comforting of the community: 'Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share [κοινωνός] in our sufferings [πάθηματα], you also share in our comfort [παράκλησις]' (v. 7). In other words, the Corinthians possess both the sufferings and the comfort of Paul. So it is the *continuity* of experience between the apostle and the Corinthians that is ultimately being highlighted by the prologue. Paul 'invites the Corinthians' to interpret their experience in light of his 'narrative' of suffering and comfort.<sup>333</sup> This invitation is noted in the bold text below.

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<sup>332</sup> I established earlier that Paul views 'weakness' as a comprehensive category for his suffering terminology, including θλίψις (1.4). See sec. IV.i of Ch. 2.

<sup>333</sup> Lim, *Sufferings*, 43.



Therefore, the flow of Paul's thanksgiving suggests—contrary to the prevailing interpretation—that the apostle is not self-focused nor apostolically-oriented in v. 3-7. His focus is on God, the source of comfort, and how this comfort moves from the apostle to the Corinthians. There is still room for viewing Paul's apostleship as unique—he has the privilege of relaying comfort to Corinth—but his intimacy with God rests on the same spectrum as the Corinthians, given that they share comfort and sufferings (v. 6-7). As Seifrid suggests, 'the life and existence of an apostle is merely Christian existence written large.'<sup>334</sup> This understanding of apostleship allows the interpreter to consider more deeply the passage's emphasis on God's comfort and, in particular, its overlooked impact upon the community. I suggest that Hafemann's conclusion is slightly skewed: 'The ultimate purpose of Paul's argument in verses 3b-7 is not to comfort the Corinthians, but to bring honour to God as the one who has shown himself in and through Paul's afflictions to be the faithful Father of the Lord Jesus Christ'.<sup>335</sup> Paul's prologue culminates not merely with a focus on God, but with God's comforting work *among the Corinthians*. The apostle portrays God as a spring of comforting water, welling up into a vigorous stream that descends into the

<sup>334</sup> Seifrid, *Corinthians*, xxiv. Also e.g. John Howard Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*, SNTSMS 26 (Cambridge University Press, 1975), 245.

<sup>335</sup> Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 62.



community. Although it is tempting to run up the mountain, searching for the spring, this would distract from Paul's emphasis: the interaction between God and community below.

*ii. The Corinthian Situation and Its Implications for the Letter*

The conclusion that 1.3-7 is concerned with the comforting of the Corinthians leads to the question of the community's situation. Paul presumably refers to the Corinthians when he says that he comforts 'those who are in any affliction [θλιψις]' (v. 4). He then explicitly states that the community shares 'the same sufferings [πάθηματα]' (v. 6b), which explains why they need comfort in the first place. But a connection between a concrete form of suffering in Corinth and the opening lines of 2 Corinthians is rarely, if at all, proposed.<sup>336</sup> Even the major studies of 1.3-11 by Alary<sup>337</sup> and Innasimuthu<sup>338</sup> make little effort to discern the situation in Corinth. One could argue that without the knowledge that the Corinthians' pains are ongoing (2.1-7), the apostle's suggestion that the Corinthians are, for instance, experiencing θλιψις (1.4) would be of less interest. But the assertions in v. 4-6, and especially the climax in v. 7, make Paul's position abundantly clear: the community needs help. This general scenario agrees with the suggestion of most interpreters that there is friction between Paul and the community (e.g. 1.17-19; 2.8-10), even if this section of 2 Corinthians was penned at a later date.<sup>339</sup> In support of connecting the Corinthians' suffering (1.3-7) to their pain (2.1-7), Paul says that he and the community share (κοινωνός) in a particular set of sufferings (v. 7)—a circumstance that sounds very similar to the shared pains of 2.1-7. Yet there is no scholarly recognition of the contradiction between the Corinthian afflictions (1.3-7) and the view that their pains have ceased.

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<sup>336</sup> To my knowledge, there are no proposals in v. 3-7 for a specific suffering in Corinth beyond Welborn's studies on pain. See sec. IV.i of Ch. 2 for further discussion. My argument there augments Welborn's work by providing a semantic rationale for connecting the community's suffering (1.3-7) with pain (2.1-7).

<sup>337</sup> Alary, 'Grief', 218-89.

<sup>338</sup> Innasimuthu, 'Comfort', 468-72.

<sup>339</sup> See sec. IV.iii of Ch. 2 for more on this partition theory.

When interpreters address the Corinthian situation in 1.3-7 they tend towards a general interpretation of the community's suffering.<sup>340</sup> Stegman states, 'What are the sufferings that the Corinthians endure? Paul knows that Christians can face misunderstanding, even opposition, from family, kin, friends and associates.... In addition, he realizes that the gospel...demands sacrifice and self-denial'.<sup>341</sup> Such an explanation simply fails to consider the possibility of sufferings unique to Corinth. To be fair, Paul is not explicit about the *nature* of the suffering. Like many of his prologues, this section possesses what Furnish calls a 'liturgical cast' which, for some interpreters, is a license to focus on aspects of the passage besides the context to which it is directed.<sup>342</sup> But even if Furnish is correct, Paul's decision to refer to the Corinthians' suffering at such a crucial point in his argument suggests that he is not dwelling on it purely for doxological purposes. There is some kind of pastoral context—a need within the community—that Paul is addressing. One otherwise inherits the nonsensical position of explaining why Paul makes references to Corinthian suffering when such a circumstance does not exist in Corinth!

But the proposed connection between the community's pains and the suffering identified in the prologue must rest on more than the above. The key suffering vocabulary in 1.3-7 is *θλίψις* (v. 4) and *πάθημα* (v. 6-7). As noted previously, Paul uses *θλίψις* alongside *λυπέω* in the catalogue of 6.3-10.<sup>343</sup> Paul uses several words in this passage which denote suffering, saying at one point that he commends himself 'in afflictions (*ἐν θλίψεσιν*)' (v. 4) and at another that he is 'sorrowful (*λυπούμενοι*), yet always rejoicing' (v. 10). That these terms are used in Paul's catalogue suggests that *θλίψις* and *λυπ*- words

<sup>340</sup> See e.g. Stegman, *Corinthians*, 40; Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 68; Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 27.

<sup>341</sup> Stegman, *Corinthians*, 40.

<sup>342</sup> Furnish, *Corinthians*, 110. Also see Martin, *Corinthians*, 7 and Garland, *Corinthians*, 62-3. Thrall, *Corinthians*, 1:101 helpfully comments, 'The blessing-paragraph has a liturgical setting in that the letter would be read when the Corinthian Christians gathered for worship....But neither the opening phrase nor the paragraph as a whole is liturgical in the sense of constituting a verbatim quotation of a congregational hymn or prayer.'

<sup>343</sup> See sec. IV.i of Ch. 2. For the meaning of *θλίψις*, see e.g. Rom. 8.35, 1 Cor. 7.28, 1 Th. 3.3.

denote similar experiences—if one experiences θλίψις, one might also experience λύπη. This association is supported by Paul's use of παράκλησις/παρακαλέω as an antonym for θλίψις (1.3-5; 7.4) and λύπη (2.7). Πάθημα is also contrasted with παράκλησις/παρακαλέω (1.5-7), implying that it too may be synonymous with λυπ- words.<sup>344</sup> All of this suggests that when Paul proclaims comfort for the community's suffering, he is speaking to the scars of the Corinthians' relational pain. At the very least, making a connection with this context affords a more precise reading of 1.3-7 that is attuned to the community and does not ignore their situation or gloss over it with the general afflictions of Christian existence.

Paul's focus on the Corinthians' pains cannot be seen, however, as limited to the prologue. Like other Pauline epistles, it is widely agreed that the content of the prologue in 2 Corinthians foreshadows its later content, thus suggesting that the material as a whole is far more interested in the Corinthians than the apostolic ministry or Paul himself.<sup>345</sup> The apostle recognizes at the outset of his argument that the community continues to suffer deep pains (2.1-7) and, in response, he is going to draw upon God's comfort (1.3-7). Instead of a deeply ironic engagement with opponents, or a calming argument at the end of a long conflict, 1.3-7 signals renewed attention to a community that continues to rebel against Paul. Their relationship is not weighed down by doctrinal dispute, but by a deeply emotional response to Paul's previous visit and letter. This context prepares us for 1.8-11, where a fuller and entirely unexpected response to the relational conflict awaits.

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<sup>344</sup> See sec. IV.i of Ch. 2 for more on the intricate relationships within Paul's suffering vocabulary.

<sup>345</sup> For more on the symmetry between a Pauline letter's prologue and body, see Paul Schubert, *The Form and Function of Pauline Thanksgivings* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1939), 180 and P.T. O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul*, NovTSup 49 (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 261-63.

iii. *Illustrating God's Comfort: The Provocation of the Affliction in Asia (v. 8-11)*

Paul's discourse on the affliction in Asia is typically read as a defence of his apostleship.<sup>346</sup> Harvey argues that Paul's deliverance (v. 10) represents 'the evidence afforded by his own life that God does indeed accept and support him'.<sup>347</sup> While this conclusion is correct in one sense—Paul is communicating that God has not rejected him in his suffering—the preceding verses suggest that he is concerned with more than his own afflictions. Paul only mentions his ministry in terms of the service provided to the Corinthians, which is evident in the chiasmic argument that focuses on the movement of divine comfort from Paul to the community (1.3-4) and the sharing of suffering (v. 6-7). But is there evidence in 1.8-11 that Paul remains focused on God's work in Corinth?

The first clue is the thematic and lexical continuity between v. 3-7 and v. 8-11. Paul begins with the comfort of God amidst afflictions (v. 3-7). He opens the episode in Asia referring to a θλῖψις (v. 8) which, although beginning with θάνατος and νεκρός (v. 9), eventually led to divine deliverance (v. 10). So the suffering theme and its heavenly solution is maintained. Paul provides yet another clue in v. 11, stating, 'You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf'. Paul's deliverance in Asia is meant to occasion prayer, praise and thanksgiving in Corinth. Although this could be a result of Paul's successful defence, the wider application drawn from this autobiographical discourse nonetheless concerns the life of the community rather than Paul's own ministry.

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<sup>346</sup> A classic study which defends this position is Harvey, *Renewal*, 13-4. Also see Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 76 and D. I. Starling, "'We Do Not Want You to Be Unaware ...': Disclosure, Concealment and Suffering in 2 Cor 1-7", *New Testament Studies* 60, no. 2 (2014): 276-77.

<sup>347</sup> Harvey, *Renewal*, 34.

This suggests that v. 8-11 is not only a continuation of the prologue (v. 3-7); rather, this material is an *illustrative example* of how God comforts both Paul and the Corinthians.<sup>348</sup>

Having established that Paul's interest in the Corinthians' situation continues through v. 8-11, one is prepared to consider the basic theological shape of this passage. It begins with Paul playing the informant: although he is afflicted, he is not so ashamed as to avoid mentioning his 'affliction [θλιψις]...in Asia' (1.8). The extraordinary quality of Paul's strategy in 2 Corinthians reaches its first peak—the apostle is rejected for his sufferings (cf. 10.10), yet he defends himself based upon these very experiences. Most think Paul's affliction was a moment of intense persecution, perhaps experienced with the mob in Ephesus (Acts 19.23-40).<sup>349</sup> But the historical nature of this event remains out of reach for exegetes. Paul simply does not provide sufficient detail.<sup>350</sup> All one can analyze is how Paul responded to his experience, not where it took place or what, specifically, it was.

Paul's next sentence provides the clearest description of his initial reaction to the θλιψις (v.8): 'For we were so deeply burdened [καθ' ὑπερβολὴν...ἐβαρήθημεν] beyond our strength [ὕπερ δυνάμιν] that we despaired [ἐξαπορηθῆναι] of life itself'. This verse is filled with emotion. The first verb (i.e. βαρέω) suggests an emotional burden, a taxing mental state.<sup>351</sup> Paul likewise uses ἐξαπορέω in v. 8, a synonym of λυπ- words, to describe his deep-seated despair.<sup>352</sup> The use of ὑπερβολή intensifies the sense in which he exhausted his ability to deal with this struggle. Stegman rightly comments that Paul is demonstrating his

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<sup>348</sup> Building upon Paul's use of γάρ in v. 8, several interpreters take v. 8-11 to be an explanation of how consolation can attend affliction: e.g. Collins, *Corinthians*, 36 and Long, *Handbook*, 18.

<sup>349</sup> See e.g. Thrall, *Corinthians*, 1:116 and Lim, *Sufferings*, 58-9. For an extended discussion concerning the nature of the affliction in Asia, see Harvey, *Renewal*, 9-14.

<sup>350</sup> Even Harvey, *Renewal*, 13, admits that one cannot discern the precise nature of the event. Also see e.g. Thrall, *Corinthians*, 1:116 and Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 64.

<sup>351</sup> See e.g. 2 Cor 5.4 and 1 Tim. 5.16. Also consult 'βαρέω', BDAG (3rd ed.), p. 166 or Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 81.

<sup>352</sup> Within the Pauline corpus, this term only occurs in 2 Corinthians (see also 2 Cor. 4.8). It describes the feeling of being 'at a loss psychologically' and can be glossed as 'doubt' or 'embarrassment' ('ἐξαπορέω', BDAG (3rd ed.), p. 345). Notably, *Louw-Nida* considers ἐξαπορέω (25.237) to be in the same subdomain as λυπ- words (25.272)—i.e. 'Desire Strongly' (*Louw-Nida*, vol. 2, p. 288, 314, 318).

'extreme emotional distress'.<sup>353</sup> In this way, the apostle subtly relates his despair in Asia to the Corinthians' own form of depression.<sup>354</sup> More importantly, Paul implies that his struggle is an experience of weakness given that it moved him 'beyond strength [ὕπὲρ δύναντιν]' (v. 9a). The use of ὑπέρ is significant because it underlines that Paul has absolutely no recourse to strength.<sup>355</sup> This suggests that Paul embodies the community's experience of a polarity of strength or weakness, where these two categories are antithetical to one another.<sup>356</sup> By virtue of his weakness in Asia, Paul felt completely incapable of being strong and competent again.

But rather than highlighting an oscillation from weakness to strength—which the Corinthians experience at times (i.e. 10.10)—Paul chooses to push deeper into the nature of this weakness that is set apart from strength. The underpinning for Paul's desperation is revealed in v. 9, where the apostle says that he felt the 'sentence of death [τὸ ἀπόκριμα τοῦ θανάτου]'. This constitutes the utter failure of Paul's ministry. He identifies himself as an agent of God's comfort (1.4), but he ceases to be comforted in any meaningful way while under the 'sentence of death' (1.9). Noticeably absent is Paul's earlier proclamation to Corinth: 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' (1 Cor. 15.55). This has given rise to Harvey's thesis that the affliction in Asia is a seminal experience for Paul—before this event, the apostle saw only death and pain in his afflictions.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Stegman, *Corinthians*, 43.

<sup>354</sup> I established that the community's pains resemble depression in sec. IV.i.d of Ch. 2.

<sup>355</sup> For the use of ὑπέρ to mean 'beyond', see e.g. 1 Cor 4.6, 10.13 and Gal. 1.14. Both Long, *Corinthians*, 20 and Barnett, *Corinthians*, 603 observe that δύναμις occurs here without an accompanying ἄσθεν- word, thus placing emphasis on the ὑπέρ. Paul is underlining the difference between his experience and that of the strength in weakness paradox.

<sup>356</sup> See sec. IV.ii of Ch. 2.

<sup>357</sup> Harvey, *Renewal*, 27-31. I agree with Harvey that there is a difference between Paul's thinking in v. 8-9a and v. 9b-11. However, Harvey does not consider whether this change may be less about Paul's biography and more about his strategy in responding to the circumstances in the community. Lim, *Sufferings*, 59-60 rightly criticizes Harvey for implying that experiences of suffering are new for Paul in 2 Corinthians when this is certainly not the case (e.g. 1 Th. 2.9 and Gal 6.17). As I suggest below, Paul appears to fashion

Whether or not Harvey is correct regarding the importance of this affliction in Paul's biography, the sense in which Paul believed himself to be stuck in the deepest weakness is confirmed by his use of ἀπόκριμα (v. 9a). This word typically refers to an 'official report' or 'decision' from a ruler.<sup>358</sup> But given Paul's capacity for disregarding authority (e.g. 2 Cor. 3.1; Gal. 1.6-12), and his focus on God's actions in v. 3-7, this verdict likely bore more weight than that of an earthly ruler. Paul perceived a heavenly verdict of doom.<sup>359</sup> Here the apostle's experience of polarized weakness is underlined by his theological wasteland: he believes that God intends to ruin him through suffering. As a result, Paul does not mention a desperate attempt to save his life. His own creativity had failed before the declaration of a greater power. Barrett comments, 'Death marks the frontier of human existence. Within [one's life] man has...a certain scope for self-confidence; but to approach the frontier, as Paul had done, is to recognize not merely the limits but the ultimate self-deception of such self-confidence'.<sup>360</sup> In Asia, death reigned over Paul, if only briefly.

While the divine declaration of death is not representative of Paul's understanding of weakness, as will be demonstrated below, this horrifying proclamation is significant for the apostle's understanding of God's comfort in v. 3-7. It is with this 'sentence of death' that God's comfort must be reconciled. The Lord of comfort both declares death and delivers one from it. He does not work on human terms. 'When God makes alive, He kills; when He justifies, He imposes guilt; when He leads us to heaven, He thrusts us down to Hell'.<sup>361</sup> And

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an episode from his life, not so much to disclose a turning point for himself, but to connect with the Corinthians and demonstrate how they can be transformed by God amidst their pains.

<sup>358</sup> 'ἀπόκριμα', BDAG (3rd ed.), p. 113. This term is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament.

<sup>359</sup> Colin J. Hemer, 'A Note on 2 Corinthians 1:9', *Tyndale Bulletin* 23 (1972): 103–7 argues that there are no precedents in the first century CE for using ἀπόκριμα in relation to judicial death sentences. Therefore, this term refers to Paul's perception of God's response—something like a divine death sentence. This has become the dominant interpretation, see e.g. Harris, *Corinthians*, 156 and Barrett, *Corinthians*, 65.

<sup>360</sup> Barrett, *Corinthians*, 65.

<sup>361</sup> Martin Luther, WA 18:633; LW 33:62 (*The Bondage of the Will*).

it is there, in the darkness of his affliction, that Paul realizes he cannot depend on himself and so he must depend on God. This is precisely what Paul says in the next sentence, which marks the beginning of a construct that develops throughout 2 Corinthians: 'But that [i.e. the affliction in Asia] was to make us rely [πεποιθότες], not on ourselves, but on God, who raises the dead [τῷ θεῷ τῷ ἐγείροντι τοὺς νεκρούς]' (v. 9b). It is believed that this surprising revelation indicates a partial, if not full, resolution of any historical circumstance that Paul might have in mind.<sup>362</sup> But the most important reality is theological. This verse marks the beginning of Paul's long elaboration of the strength in weakness paradox in 2 Corinthians. The apostle began the prologue by announcing the coming of a comfort that is not his own, and it is now clear that this is because the comfort takes the form of a paradox: as Paul lies dying, he experiences divine deliverance. This raises questions that will be explored in the following section: What is the logical nature of this paradox? What is its theological origin? And how precisely does it help Paul in his conflict with Corinth?

#### *iv. Summary*

Before proceeding to a fuller evaluation of the paradox in 1.8-11, I offer a brief review of what has been established so far. I began this section by analyzing the outward movement of comfort from the God of 'all comfort' (v. 3b) to Paul (v. 4a) and to the Corinthians (v. 4b). Rather than a linear God-Paul-Corinthians model, with an emphasis on Paul's apostleship, I argued that the movement of comfort is chiastic: God (v. 3b), Paul (v. 4a), the community (v. 4b), Paul (v. 4c), God (v. 4d). The result is that Paul's focus rests on God, and especially on his ministry to the Corinthians in the midst of their affliction (θλίψις). This is clearest in v. 6-7, where Paul emphasizes that the Corinthians share in his

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<sup>362</sup> See e.g. Garland, *Corinthians*, 81; Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 43; Stegman, *Corinthians*, 43-44.



comfort (παράκλησις/παρακαλέω) and sufferings (πάθηματα). Despite Paul's role as apostle, he sees more similarity than dissimilarity between himself and the community.

Paul's emphasis on the Corinthians' suffering raises the question: what concrete situation might be in view? This issue has been neglected by the existing literature even though Paul later names an explicit context of suffering: the Corinthians' pains resulting from his previous visit and letter (2.1-7; 7.5-16). Crucially, Paul and the Corinthians share these pains (2.1-4), much like the shared suffering in the prologue (1.6-7). So I conclude that Paul uses 1.3-7 to subtly invoke God's comfort for the Corinthians' pains. Given that Pauline thanksgivings tend to foreshadow later content, I suggest that all of 2 Corinthians serves this purpose rather than a self-focused defence or exposition of Paul's ministry.

Finally, I argue that Paul's affliction in Asia is an illustration of God's comforting ministry (v. 3-7). Although Paul is recording his experience, it initially models the Corinthians' polarity of strength or weakness through the apostle's despair (v. 8b). This is confirmed by Paul's reference to being 'beyond strength [ὑπὲρ δύναμιν]' (v. 9a), which suggests an experience of weakness that is totally exclusive of strength (i.e. a polar end of the Corinthians' polarity). Paul feels that God has sentenced him to death, placing him in a theological wasteland (v. 9b). But paradoxically, he is delivered in his weakness (v. 10). It is this deliverance that is the subject of the following section, where I argue that Paul describes his experience, not so much to disclose a personal turning point, but to connect with the Corinthians and demonstrate how they can be transformed by God in their pains.

### III. The First Instance of Paradox

#### *i. The Christological Basis for Paul's Experience*

The experience outlined in 1.8-11 is not a purely rhetorical phenomenon. Although Witherington contends that Paul embodies the 'defendant' and 'had to assign some reasons and motives' for his despicable weaknesses, there are certain dynamics which suggest that Paul is locating the paradox outside of his polemical aims.<sup>363</sup> Paul despairs of 'life' (v. 8) to the point of feeling the 'sentence of death' (v. 9a) so that he might rely on the 'God who raises the dead' (v. 9b). His deliverance is credited to God, and his 'hope' for another rescue (v. 10b) confirms that such experiences do not rest under his control. In fact, Paul's coordinated experiences of life and death lead many to suggest that he is looking beyond himself to a connection between his experience and the Christ event.<sup>364</sup> This intermingling of Paul's reality and Christ's resonates with the apostle's repeated emphasis that God is working in his life (v. 3-7). While one cannot entirely distinguish Paul's rhetoric and theology—the latter is expressed through the former<sup>365</sup>—Paul's language suggests that the affliction in Asia is something that *happened to him* rather than being *produced by him*.

A significant attempt to understand the basis of Paul's experience is offered by Kraftchick, who notes that Paul connects his experience with the Christ event throughout 2 Corinthians (e.g. 4.7-15; 5.14-21).<sup>366</sup> However, he does so in a 'nonsyllogistic' manner.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>363</sup> Witherington, *Corinth*, 361. Also see Harvey, *Renewal*, 13.

<sup>364</sup> See e.g. Bultmann, *Corinthians*, 28 and Lim, *Sufferings*, 60-62. To my knowledge, every treatment of the affliction in Asia recognizes at least some kind of analogy or spiritual connection between Paul's suffering and the death and resurrection of Christ.

<sup>365</sup> I agree with those studies which—implicitly or explicitly—suggest that Paul's theology is primary while his rhetoric, if he utilizes such forms of persuasion, is secondary. See e.g. Duane Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching: The Apostle's Challenge to the Art of Persuasion in Ancient Corinth* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2015), 259-322 and Ryan S. Schellenberg, *Rethinking Paul's Rhetorical Education: Comparative Rhetoric and 2 Corinthians 10-13*, ECL 10 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 1-10.

<sup>366</sup> Steven Kraftchick, 'Death in Us, Life in You', in *Pauline Theology*, ed. David Hay, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 156-81.

This suggests that, rather than searching for a systematic connection between Paul and Christ, one must embrace a more organic approach. So Kraftchick proposes that Christ's life and death are the guiding *metaphor* for Paul's theology.<sup>368</sup> This conclusion makes sense of the affliction in Asia, where the apostle takes the separate events of Christ's death and resurrection and distills them into a coordinated phenomenon. Paul experienced the sentence of death only to be made alive (v. 9-10). The apostle seems to appeal to this Christological sequence because it challenges the Corinthian assumption that strength and weakness are mutually exclusive experiences. According to Kraftchick: 'A metaphor's important feature is its ability to point out unseen similarities and analogies because it introduces an incongruity that causes us to reflect on our normal mode of evaluation'.<sup>369</sup> But the difficulty with this approach is its overly literary nature. One must recall that the metaphor is *actualized* in Paul's life. He moves from cowering at the prospect of death (v. 8) to being a hope-filled survivor who has been delivered by God (v. 10).

Of the more common views relating to the basis of Paul's experience in Asia, including viewing Jesus as a moral exemplar,<sup>370</sup> only a participatory relationship captures the sense in which Jesus's death and resurrection are actualized in Paul's life.<sup>371</sup> The apostle has been developing this Christological foundation from the beginning of the prologue, where he insisted that 'the sufferings of Christ are abundant [περισσεύει] in us' (1.5). The

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>370</sup> See e.g. Stegman, *Character*, 258-61; Pickett, Cross, 192-207; Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 342-43.

<sup>371</sup> The reason being that Jesus as *exemplar only* does not fully capture the sense in which Christ lives in those who are identified with him. See e.g. Merrill C. Proudfoot, 'Imitation or Realistic Participation: A Study of Paul's Concept of 'Suffering with Christ'', *Int* 17 (1963): 140-60 and Constantine Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012): 184. Another option is to follow Lim, *Sufferings*, 16 in asserting that the connection between Paul and Christ is one of narrative. But not only is this suggestion overly literary, it fails to appreciate that Paul never refers to a *text* about Jesus in 2 Corinthians. The connection has to be more experiential. Lim seems to recognize this where, in his conclusion, he says that Paul 'invite[s] [the Corinthians] to participate' in Christ's story (p. 198).

use of περισσεύω conjures images of Christ's sufferings overflowing into Paul's life.<sup>372</sup> In this sense, the basis of Paul's experience in Asia appears to be a *theological* paradox built upon the apostle's participation in Christ's death and resurrection. This is clearest in 13.4, where Paul says, 'For he was crucified in weakness [ἐξ ἀσθενείας], but lives by the power of God [ἐκ δυνάμεως θεοῦ]. For we also are weak [ἀσθενοῦμεν] in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God [ἐκ δυνάμεως θεοῦ].' Paul's emphasis on Christ's crucifixion, not simply his death, suggests that any similarity of experience between Paul's and Christ's weakness must involve physical realities. But Paul also recognizes the cross to be a multi-faceted phenomenon: Christ was cursed (Gal. 3.13), forsaken by God (Rom. 3.24-5), and his death was foolishness in the world's eyes (1 Cor. 1.20-25). In a similar manner, Paul faces physical (2 Cor. 10.10; 11.6) and emotional sufferings (2.1-7; 11.28), and is regarded by the Corinthians as an inferior leader (10.10; 11.1-5). But most importantly, Paul is connected to Christ by his faith (13.4-5; cf. Rom. 5.1; Gal 2.16).<sup>373</sup> The result is well-summarized by Paul's use of ἐν in 13.4—'we are weak in [ἐν] him'—which has a relational thrust, and thus suggests that Paul has an intimate, participatory relationship with Christ.<sup>374</sup> Campbell comments, 'More than modeling the weakness of Christ and living by God's power, [Paul] shares in those things too'.<sup>375</sup>

This connection between Paul and Christ is crucial because, as discussed previously, it opens the door for the apostle's experiences to be paradigmatic for the Corinthians based upon their participation in Christ's story.<sup>376</sup> But such participation is

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<sup>372</sup> This term is utilized elsewhere to refer to grace given by God (Rom 5.15), hope produced by the Spirit (Rom. 15. 13), and works produced by grace (2 Cor. 9.8). See 'περισσεύω', BDAG (3rd ed.), p. 805.

<sup>373</sup> I make this connection clearer in my interpretation of 2 Cor. 13.4-5. See sec. VI of Ch. 5.

<sup>374</sup> This use is listed as an option for the interpretation of ἐν by Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 372. See e.g. Rom. 3.24 and 2 Cor. 5.21 for similar uses. A survey of different uses of ἐν in relation to Christ is undertaken by Campbell, *Union*, 67-198.

<sup>375</sup> Campbell, *Union*, 184.

<sup>376</sup> See sec. IV.i.d of Ch. 2 for more discussion on the Corinthians' relationship to Christ.

often viewed as a static phenomenon. On a closer reading of 13.4, however, the connection between Christ and Paul is helpfully nuanced by the Nicene understanding of Christ's prior *incarnation*. Christ experiences strength in weakness during his earthly life, thus enabling Paul to do the same. Echoing Athanasius, Hooker suggests, 'Christ became what we are, in order that, in him, we might become what he is'.<sup>377</sup> She describes this process as an 'interchange' that manifests the life of Christ in the life of Paul.<sup>378</sup> So the strength in weakness paradox is the inbreaking of a divine reality into earthly reality—first in the Christ event, and then for those in Christ. But the question remains: what is Paul's experience of the paradox? And what exactly does Christ aim to achieve for Paul?

*ii. Following the God Who Raises the Dead: An Introduction to the Proto-Paradox*

The affliction in Asia might appear, at first glance, to be concerned with the 'problem of suffering' and how one might find the 'positive value of suffering for the Christian'.<sup>379</sup> But Paul's presentation is more complex than that. His focus is not on suffering alone, but also the life resulting from it (v. 10). He does not envision a re-working of death so that it *becomes* life and gains positive meaning; rather, death is re-cast in the sense that it *leads* to life. Paul says, 'But that [i.e. his sentence of death] was to make us rely not on ourselves but on the God who raises the dead' (v. 9b). The apostle's penultimate statement indicates that he expects to suffer again: 'On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again' (v. 10b). So the deliverance in Asia is not concerned with *overcoming* suffering so much as a new representation of the *relationship* between strength and weakness. This is precisely what one would expect given that the Corinthians' struggle is not merely with deep suffering but with a polarity of strength *or* weakness.

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<sup>377</sup> Morna D. Hooker, *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 42.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-72.

<sup>379</sup> Harvey, *Renewal*, 31.

Paul's aim in 1.8-11 is, in the broadest sense, to show that strength is not merely opposed to weakness, it is also necessarily related to it.

To be more precise, by referring to life and death—ζάω (1.8) and θάνατος/νεκρός (1.9)—Paul appeals to two opposing realities that are naturally contrasted.<sup>380</sup> But instead of emphasizing their discontinuity, Paul uses the ἵνα in v. 9b to reveal a level of continuity between them. There is a purpose for the 'sentence of death': it was given 'to make us rely not on ourselves but God' (v. 9). In other words, Paul's experience of death is integral to his experience of deliverance to the extent that they form a seemingly unbreakable sequence. This means that Paul's experience differs from most philosophical paradoxes, such as the Liar Paradox (i.e. 'everything I say is false') or Heraclitus' famous anecdote: 'You could not step twice into the same river'.<sup>381</sup> It is not a logical problem to be solved, a proverbial statement, or merely a deep irony. It is an irreducible contrast between opposing experiences that nonetheless cannot be separated from one another. Bultmann says, 'It was precisely in his distress that the meaning of distress dawned on Paul'.<sup>382</sup> The apostle learns that his deliverance, like Jesus's resurrection, must come through his experience of death.

Despite my description above, Paul appears to leave a variety of unanswered questions about the paradox in 1.8-11: Does life eventually overpower death? How might one summarize the relationship between the two? Is it merely one of sequence? Consequently, Paul's record of his experience is actually fairly rudimentary. It *almost* satisfies the basic form of Pauline paradox described previously: two contradictory entities

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<sup>380</sup> See similar contrasts in e.g. Rom. 6.23, 8.6 and 2 Cor. 4.11.

<sup>381</sup> As cited in Plato, *Crat.*, 402a. This means that I reach a largely different conclusion than Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *The Paradox of the Cross in the Thought of St. Paul*, JSNTSup 17 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 186-87, who argues that it is 'as the emotional temperature rises' in 2 Corinthians that 'Paul seems to slip naturally into expressing himself in paradoxes and contrasts'. While one could certainly offer circumstantial reasons for the apostle's paradoxes (as I will do), they still express a deeper theological reality.

<sup>382</sup> Bultmann, *Corinthians*, 28.

or realities that are simultaneously true.<sup>383</sup> While Paul experiences the contrasting realities of life and death, and there is some congruity between them, they remain in a chronological sequence. This suggests that the affliction in Asia is technically a *proto-paradox*. There are other paradoxes in 2 Corinthians which appear to be more developed and represent an experience that moves beyond a *sequence* of weakness to strength into a *simultaneous* experience of these realities—a prospect that is initially explored in 4.7-15.<sup>384</sup> In fact, as I will argue, there is an even more developed form of paradox which includes elements of simultaneity alongside a unique, ontological relationship between its opposites. I will describe this sort of paradox as a *co-inherent* reality (e.g. 4.7a; 12.9-10).<sup>385</sup> Although these three types—proto-, simultaneous, and co-inherent—all possess some characteristics of a paradox, only the latter two are presented as formal paradoxes wherein two opposites are simultaneously true.<sup>386</sup> But the key conclusion here is simply that the proto-paradox of 1.8-11 represents the sequential provision of rescue and life in the midst of Paul's despair.

### *iii. Why Enlist a Paradox?: The Pragmatic Difference Between God and Humanity*

An issue that naturally arises from my description of Paul's experience above is the utility of paradox, especially a proto-paradox, for the apostle's situation. A paradox is a confusing construct, and this may explain why few interpreters view it as a useful category in 2 Corinthians. But there is a variable in Paul's experience of affliction which, although routinely noted, has not been considered as a cause for God's paradoxical intervention—

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<sup>383</sup> See esp. Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 27-30, 35. Here Hotze says, 'Eine "Paradoxie im engeren Sinne" ist derjenige Satz der formalen Logik, der die simultane Geltung zweier kontradiktorisch entgegengesetzter Größen behauptet'.

<sup>384</sup> I discuss this passage, along with its more developed paradox, beginning on p. 118 below.

<sup>385</sup> See esp. sec. IV.ii of Ch. 5.

<sup>386</sup> Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 27-30; also see p. 2-3 above.

Paul's helplessness.<sup>387</sup> It is in the moment when Paul has lost all hope that the proto-paradox strikes: he despaired even of life itself (v. 9b). In fact, Paul believes he is 'beyond strength' (v. 8b), suggesting that he is incapable of addressing his dire situation. This is echoed throughout 2 Corinthians, where Paul routinely notes his impotence in statements that *are not paradoxical* (e.g. 11.21; 12.11; 13.9). He proclaims that he and Timothy 'are not competent [ἱκανοί] in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves' (3.5). Upon describing the work of God in him, Paul asks, 'Who is sufficient [ἱκανός] for these things?' (2.16). In other words, Paul possesses some sort of broad inadequacy—both internal (i.e. attitudinal, emotional) and external (i.e. behavioural, circumstantial)—that is not entirely solvable from a human perspective. Likewise, I noted earlier that the Corinthians' experience of λύπη requires the divine intervention of the paradox because it can resemble depression and leads to extremely troubling issues such as manic episodes, moral paralysis, and existential aimlessness.<sup>388</sup>

Unlike the Corinthians' present state, however, Paul experienced a rescue from his darkness. Although he clamours at the prospect of death (1.8), God raises the dead (v. 9)! This difference is reiterated elsewhere: God is competent (3.5), powerful (e.g. 4.7b), glorious (e.g. 4.4-6), and his gift is sufficient (e.g. 12.9-10). This suggests that whether it is in the affliction in Asia or, more generally, the suffering inherent to the Corinthian conflict, God is able to operate where human creativity fails. In this sense, Paul envisions a *pragmatic* difference between God and humanity that will become clearer over the course of my exegetical analysis.<sup>389</sup> It is important to grasp now, however, because it provides an

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<sup>387</sup> See e.g. Stegman, *Corinthians*, 43 and Barrett, *Corinthians*, 65.

<sup>388</sup> See sec. IV.ii of Ch. 2.

<sup>389</sup> Here I am referring not to an ontological or moral difference, but the practical difference between God and humanity in the face of suffering. This does not mean that Paul is uninterested in the ontological or moral dimensions of the Corinthians lives, only that their tangible acts and disposition are Paul's primary interest.



early signal of the paradox's significance. The strength in weakness paradox is meant to help humanity in its helplessness. This occurs through the provision of tangible yet paradoxical solutions to human experiences of weakness. One should thus envision the strength in weakness paradox as an intrusive engagement. The Christ event represents the first action that navigates the difference between God and humanity—through Christ, Paul gains access to strength that he otherwise lacks in suffering (13.4). Flowing from this, all of God's actions in 2 Corinthians can be characterized as an outward movement that navigates the difference between God and humanity to intrude upon, or surprise, the recipient with an unexpected solution to their plight (e.g. 4.7; 12.7-10). Martyn rightly says that the Pauline proclamation is 'at its heart *invasive* rather than responsive'.<sup>390</sup> But the paradox does not simply invade human space—in the proto-paradox, it transforms Paul from a despairing shadow of himself (1.8) to a hopeful apostle (v. 10) and, in doing so, lessens the gap between God and humanity. The nature of this transformation, and how exactly it makes the Corinthians more like Christ, is the focus of the following section.

#### *iv. Summary*

This section established that Paul's experience of the affliction in Asia is deeply Christological and thus represents not only a literary phenomenon, but what appears to be a theological paradox. I suggest that the paradox's basis is Paul's participation with Christ (1.5; 13.4), in which Paul shares in the various dimensions of Jesus's death and resurrection. This is predicated upon Jesus's incarnation: he became weak by taking on flesh so that those united with him might be able to experience strength in weakness. Paul's experience derives from Christ's experience, involving two opposing realities—life (1.8)

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<sup>390</sup> J. Louis Martyn, 'Events in Galatia: Modified Covenantal Nomism versus God's Invasion of the Cosmos in the Singular Gospel: A Response to J.D.G. Dunn and B.R. Gaventa', in *Pauline Theology*, ed. Jouette M. Bassler, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 163.

and death (1.9)—that are connected to one another in an unbreakable sequence that borders upon simultaneity. The use of ἵνα suggests a purpose for the 'sentence of death': it was given 'to make us rely not on ourselves but God' (v. 9b). However, Paul does not heavily develop this experience, and it almost satisfies a basic definition of paradox: two contradictory realities that are simultaneously true. So I deem the affliction in Asia to technically be a *proto-paradox*, in anticipation of more nuanced formulations (e.g. 4.7a; 12.10).

I conclude this section by considering why Paul appeals to a phenomenon as confusing as a proto-paradox or other paradoxical constructs. It is not to defend himself, but to address a broad difference that he perceives between God and humanity: God is competent and sufficient (4.7b; 12.9) whereas humanity is helpless to manage its circumstances (2.1-4; 3.5). So the strength in weakness paradox is given to transform humanity's experience of weakness, especially through the provision of tangible, divine help (e.g. the proto-paradox in 1.8-10). A divine intervention is required because the Corinthians are struggling with λύπη which, as argued earlier, resembles depression and is not readily solved by human solutions. Precisely how the proto-paradox changes Paul and the Corinthians, and what it achieves practically, is detailed in the following section.

#### IV. The Function of the Proto-Paradox in 1.8-11

Perhaps the most attentive reader to the fruits of the proto-paradox in 1.8-11 is Harvey, who stresses that Paul's crisis and subsequent deliverance created an 'inward renewal'.<sup>391</sup> But in characteristic fashion for interpreters of this passage, he says little regarding what this renewal accomplishes beyond the injection of meaning into one's

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<sup>391</sup> Harvey, *Renewal*, 129.

suffering.<sup>392</sup> The renewal requires a more detailed reading than this, which is provided in the analysis below.

*i. New Knowledge*

Paul's personal revolution in 1.8-11 begins with the production of new knowledge. He understands himself to be in the throes of death. He is burdened 'beyond strength [δύναμιν]' (v. 8). The cognitive nature of his predicament is confirmed by Paul's use of ἔχω and ἀπόκριμα in v. 9: he 'received' the 'sentence' of death.<sup>393</sup> The apostle's use of ἀπόκριμα is especially important as it is a term that is highly unlikely to refer to a physical object or experience. As argued above, it is probably a divine sentencing (i.e. something that must be discerned or perceived).<sup>394</sup> So when Paul says that he learned the whole process was meant to cause him to rely on the 'God who raises the dead'—a reversal of the role God initially played in the story—he suggests that a new understanding of God is in view. Paul realizes the extent to which God does not hate the weak; rather, he delivers them.

This knowledge creates a new self-understanding as well: Paul is able to experience deliverance—life itself—amidst death. In fact, Paul is quite clear that the episode taught him not to rely 'on ourselves' but on God (v. 9b). Bultmann states, 'Anything of greater detail is unimportant to [Paul] beyond the one fact that he grasped the meaning of this distress'.<sup>395</sup> The verb πείθω (v. 9b) is especially helpful as it possesses cognitive content. It can be translated as 'to believe' or 'to trust' and here it has the sense of dependence on

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<sup>392</sup> While Harvey does not use the 'ontological' and 'revelatory' categories described earlier, his understanding of 'renewal' in 2 Corinthians is largely a realization, a knowledge-based revolution in which Paul comes to know that he is united with Christ in suffering (see e.g. p. 120-129). Harvey is not alone, however, in making unidentified assumptions about the proto-paradox: see e.g. the use of *erkennen* in Schmeller, *Korinther*, I:72 and the use of 'trust' in Harris, *Corinthians*, 157.

<sup>393</sup> For uses of ἔχω that relate to perception, see e.g. 1 Th. 5.3 and Phil 1.7. Also consult ἔχω, BDAG (3rd ed.), 420-21.

<sup>394</sup> See p. 98 above for a fuller discussion of the meaning of ἀπόκριμα in this context.

<sup>395</sup> Bultmann, *Corinthians*, 27.

God.<sup>396</sup> Paul learns in his suffering that, rather than being self-sufficient, he is reliant on God's guidance and initiative.

One can already imagine how these changes in perception would transform the Corinthian situation. Before the proto-paradox, the Corinthians know only one way to defeat weakness: to overcome it. But following the theological logic of their apostle, they learn that God himself lifts them out of the pit by attending to them in their weaknesses. They learn that not only are they freed from the bondage of weakness, but their God does not loathe weakness; rather, his comfort arrives in despair (1.6-8). As a result, there is a sense of freedom in v. 8-11—the community no longer needs to oscillate toward strength because it has already been given to them by God. Luther captures a similar liberation: 'I am stripped of everything, of myself and all that is mine. I can say: "Devil, what are you fighting? If you try to denounce my good works and my holiness before God, why, I have none....[So] here is God's strength—prosecute it until you have had enough"'.<sup>397</sup>

## *ii. New Emotions*

Although the question of knowledge is sometimes recognized in v. 8-11, the connection between the proto-paradox and the emotions is far less, if at all, developed. There is nonetheless an emotional trajectory wherein Paul moves from despair (v. 8) to hope (v. 10).<sup>398</sup> The transition suggests that Paul's surprising delivery accesses and transforms the emotions. While the blossoming of Paul's hope could merely be a deduction from his deliverance, rather than a specific effect of the proto-paradox, this seems unlikely given the close association between the 'sentence of death' and Paul's 'despair' of life in v. 8. It is the apostle's sense of being 'beyond strength' that leads to his despair. Consequently,

<sup>396</sup> See e.g. Rom. 2.19, 2 Cor. 10.7, and Gal. 5.10. Also consult 'πεῖθω', BDAG (3rd ed.), 791-92.

<sup>397</sup> LW 14:85 (*Commentary on Psalm 118*).

<sup>398</sup> If any emotional content is recognized in v. 8-11, it is this movement. See e.g. Harvey, *Renewal*, 31ff; Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 85; Garland, *Corinthians*, 82.

as Paul's understanding of the relationship between strength and weakness is changed, it naturally affects his emotional life.<sup>399</sup> His logic appears to be that the cognitive conversion of the proto-paradox possesses an emotional counterpart (cf. Rom 5.1-2; Gal. 5.22-6). Specifically, the dawn of a new self-understanding and a new perception of God produces hope.<sup>400</sup> This is a well-chosen emotion for the Corinthians because, stuck in pain amidst an ongoing relational conflict, it would be easy to drift into hopelessness. But God is so invested in the weak that Paul's experience is not a one-time shot in the arm. Instead, Paul wishes the Corinthians to join him in 'hope that he will rescue us again' (1.10).

There remains another level of emotional transformation, however, as the proto-paradox does not simply produce hope *indirectly* through certain convictions. As suggested above, it is a divine intrusion that upsets the polarity of strength or weakness. In this sense, it creates a new vision of life and reality in which one's experience is highly paradoxical. It follows that Paul's hope could be an *expression* of strength in weakness. But how so? The emotional dimensions of hope (ἐλπίς) often express the end to which one is focused—one's desired outcome (e.g. Rom 4.18, 5.2; 1 Th. 2.19). This suggests that hope has a paradoxical character because it is the virtue of believing in things not yet possessed. Barth argues that Pauline hope indicates that 'what is, exists, so far as we are now concerned, always in what we are not'.<sup>401</sup> So when Paul expresses hope that God will deliver him again (v. 10), he is modelling the continued intrusion of the proto-paradox—it produces hope out of despair, an emotion that is more paradoxical than it is polarized.

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<sup>399</sup> This is supported by 1.7, where Paul declares that his 'hope' for the Corinthians is 'unshaken' because as they 'share in our sufferings' they will also 'share in our comfort.' The working of God's comfort amidst affliction results in hope. This hope is thus reproduced in v. 10 as God's comfort becomes clearer—the proto-paradoxical occurrence of life amidst death.

<sup>400</sup> See Elliott, *Emotion*, 181-92 for a discussion of hope as an emotion in Paul and the New Testament. While hope can be portrayed as an eschatological expectation, and thus purely cognitive, this belies its Pauline usage. Hope is often referenced in emotional settings to indicate the end to which Paul is focused—his desired outcome (e.g. Rom 4.18, 5.2; 1 Th. 2.19). See 'ἐλπίς', BDAG (3rd ed.), 319-320.

<sup>401</sup> Barth, *Romans*, 153.

### *iii. New Behaviour Toward Paul*

In tracing the fruit of the proto-paradox, I have yet to mention the final verse relating to the affliction in Asia, and it is therein that Paul finally appeals explicitly to the Corinthians. Paul moves from an account of his reactions (v. 8-10) to his assumption that the community will 'help [συνυπουργούντων] us through prayer [δεήσει] for us' (v. 11). This surely would have been heard with mixed feelings. Could a wounded community pray for the person who wounded them? It is not likely, unless what Paul says in v. 8-11 is meant to change the Corinthians' outlook and behaviour rather than being merely a record of Paul's struggles. Most commentators treat the movement from v. 8-10 to v. 11 as a deduction—if the Corinthians accept that God cares for Paul, even in weakness, then it is permissible to pray for him.<sup>402</sup> Lim suggests that the Corinthians would pray for Paul out of appreciation for his mediatory work of relaying God's comfort.<sup>403</sup> Thrall goes one step further and suggests that the Corinthians are simply meant to imitate Paul—the apostle places his hope in God and the Corinthians should too.<sup>404</sup>

But all of the explanations above fail to explain how, more specifically, a theological proto-paradox motivates a community to pray for their apostle. I have established that the affliction in Asia (v. 8-11) is the continued proclamation of God's comfort (v. 3-7).<sup>405</sup> This comfort comes to Paul through the alien work of God which culminates in the provision of divine strength amidst the apostle's despair. How then does this alien rescue contribute to the Corinthians' prayers? One could suggest that the requested act of prayer is somehow paradoxical—not unlike the community's expression of

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<sup>402</sup> See e.g. Garland, *Corinthians*, 83; Harris, *Corinthians*, 158; Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 65.

<sup>403</sup> Lim, *Sufferings*, 34-5.

<sup>404</sup> Thrall, *Corinthians*, 1:122-23.

<sup>405</sup> See p. 95-96 above.

hope—but it is difficult to prove this from v. 8-11.<sup>406</sup> A likelier motivation is the outward-focused work of God. The Corinthians benefit from God's work by receiving comfort in their affliction (v. 3-7). In fact, the provision of life amidst death would not be possible without the incarnate Son of God, who chose to take on flesh and bring divine strength into the human realm.<sup>407</sup> As this work changes the Corinthians' knowledge and emotions (v. 8-10), lifting them out of their polarity, they become defined by its outward movement and thus more inclined to pray for Paul. They are not to be chained by despair, like Paul before the proto-paradox (1.8-9); rather, they can be outward-focused even in their pain. This is because God takes care of the Corinthians' weaknesses so that they can take care of the weakness and struggle of others.

This envisioned reversal in the Corinthians' behaviour is actually one aspect of a broader dynamic that Paul begins to develop in 1.3-7. The apostle repeatedly states that he is working 'for [ὐπέρ] the Corinthians (v. 6-7), but here the community prays 'for [ὐπέρ] Paul (v. 11). Of course, all of this is the work of God, who provides comfort for Paul to relay to Corinth amidst their shared sufferings (v. 3-4) and reveals to both parties a new way of understanding, and living in, weakness (v. 8-11). So the God of 'all comfort' (v. 3) *multiplies* his comfort by creating human relationships centered upon mutuality. This is confirmed by Paul's use of the additive καί (v. 11). The apostle records deliverance given by God, resulting in hope (v. 10). He then turns to the Corinthians and says 'You *also* [καί] help....' The implication is that the Corinthians are to join God in aiding Paul, embodying the outward concern that defines God's work throughout the prologue (v. 4, 6, 9-10). At the very least, this proves that the proto-paradox is not simply concerned with Paul, but with changing the Corinthians' attitude and behaviour. More specifically, Paul appears to reveal

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<sup>406</sup> I will, however, argue that Paul elsewhere views reconciliation as paradoxical. See esp. sec. V of Ch. 4.

<sup>407</sup> See p. 101-04 above.

a key facet of his argument that will be continually enriched over the course of my analysis: the apostle is writing so that the Corinthians would embody *outward-focused vulnerability*. This involves a radical adjustment of their very selves, moving from inward-focused despair to an outward-focused care for others. There is to be prayer in Corinth, not despair. The community is to learn, in a deeper way, what it means to know and follow God in Christ. Even in the midst of weakness, when the apostle who pained them is in need of prayer, the Corinthians are enabled to pray because, in Christ, they are the recipients of the ongoing, proto-paradoxical work of God in their community. It reveals a powerful God who delights in giving comfort to the weak, and thus brings hope in the midst of despair.

#### *iv. Summary*

The function of the proto-paradox is threefold in 1.8-11: it changes the Corinthians' self-understanding and knowledge of God, their emotions, and their behaviour towards Paul. The Corinthians' knowledge would be altered by learning that God delivers the weak, thus revolutionizing their theology and causing them to 'rely [πεποιθότες]' on the Lord rather than themselves (v. 9b). This change affects the Corinthians' emotions, particularly by enabling hope (v. 10), which is an emotional celebration of things not yet possessed and is thus congruent with the proto-paradox of receiving life amidst death. All of this is enacted by a God who chooses to transform the weak even in their most desperate hour, causing Paul to envision the Corinthians praying for him despite the fact that he pained them (v. 11). This signals what the radical reversals above are meant to achieve: the embodiment of *outward-focused vulnerability*, which is modelled upon God's care for the community and moves them from inward-focused despair to outward-focused care for others. Paul uses 1.3-11 not so much to defend himself, but to envision changes in the community through a prior moment of personal change marked by a proto-paradox.



## V. Paul's Transformative Transition: Setting the Trajectory for 4.7-15

After discussing the affliction in Asia, Paul recounts some of his recent itinerary (1.15-24) and his concern for the community with respect to their pains (2.1-11). The apostle then transitions to a point of contention: his refusal to produce letters of commendation (3.1-3).<sup>408</sup> This begins an apologetic section on the differences between the new covenant ministry and that of Moses in 3.7-18.<sup>409</sup> The Mosaic Law is not mentioned prior to 3.7-18, nor is it discussed afterwards. As a result, the function of this passage has been widely debated.<sup>410</sup> A typical explanation has been that Paul's opponents were Jewish so, following their request for letters, the apostle demonstrates that their pattern of ministry is passé because it belongs to the Mosaic era and not that of the Spirit.<sup>411</sup> Regardless, I am interested in 3.7-18 for a very specific reason that is not dependent upon a particular understanding of Paul's opponents or the passage generally. In 3.18, Paul proclaims, 'we all are being transformed [μεταμορφώω] into the same image from one degree of glory to another'.<sup>412</sup> Of particular concern is the meaning of μεταμορφώω: 'to change inwardly in fundamental character or condition' (cf. Rom. 12.2).<sup>413</sup> This is similar to the change enacted by the proto-paradox at the end of 1.8-11—a comprehensive renewal of one's knowledge, emotions, and behaviour. In this sense, it seems that 3.18 is subtly summarizing the

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<sup>408</sup> Most interpreters connect the discussion in 3.1-3 with the opponents' claims in chs. 10-13. See e.g. Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 115-16; Harris, *Corinthians*, 260-61; Minor, *Corinthians*, 61.

<sup>409</sup> This section is usually treated as apologetic in focus. See e.g. the overview of current scholarship in Paul Duff, *Moses in Corinth: The Apologetic Context of 2 Corinthians 3* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1-6.

<sup>410</sup> Interpretations of 3.1-18 include a clarification of Paul's views on the Law, a meditation on new creation imagery, or a discussion of the basis for Pauline ethics. See e.g. the overview of scholarship in Linda L. Belleville, *Reflections of Glory: Paul's Polemical Use of the Moses-Doxa Tradition in 2 Corinthians 3.1-18*, JSNTSup 52 (Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 13-14.

<sup>411</sup> For more discussion on the connection between 3.7-18 and the identity of Paul's opponents, see e.g. Georgi, *Opponents*, 261-62 and Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, 'Pneumatikoi and Judaizers in 2 Cor 2:14-4:6', *Australian Biblical Review* 34 (October 1986): 42-58.

<sup>412</sup> The verse literally reads 'from glory to glory' (v. 18b), but in light of the change implied by μεταμορφώω, most interpreters take the phrase to be progressive: 'from one degree of glory to another'. So e.g. Harris, *Corinthians*, 316; Jan Lambrecht, 'Transformation in 2 Cor 3:18', *Biblica* 64, no. 2 (1983): 243-54 [253-54]; Savage, *Weakness*, 147-52.

<sup>413</sup> 'μεταμορφώω', BDAG (3rd ed.), 639.

paradox's fruit: it enacts transformation that leads 'from one degree of glory to another' (v. 18). Although this is in the context of an apologetic section, my point is that the ministry being defended is one that *changes* the community as opposed to fashioning references with no transformative value. These 'kill' rather than give 'life' (v. 6).

Of course, one might object that μεταμορφώω relates more to a physical transformation, given the allusions to the Moses story and the visible transformation of his face (see Ex. 34.29-35).<sup>414</sup> However, Moses' visible transformation is the outward sign of a deeply internal interaction with the glory and holiness of God.<sup>415</sup> In the same way, Paul envisions external transformation in Corinth: an experience of hope, for instance, would certainly change the Corinthians' countenance (1.10; cf. 2.1-7). But the repeated focus of Paul's argument is an internal change that touches the heart of the community (4.6; 6.12-3). The question thus becomes: what precisely is the image into which the Corinthians are being transformed (v. 18)? Belleville proposes the apostle himself—the idea being that Paul is being transformed by the Lord into his ideal self, in spite of the accusations of the opponents.<sup>416</sup> This view seems unlikely, however, not only because the 'glory' to which one is being transformed belongs to the Spirit (v. 18b), but also given that Paul envisions a steep pragmatic difference between God and humanity throughout 2 Corinthians (e.g. 4.7b, 12.9-10). The transformation of strength in weakness makes Paul more like Jesus (e.g. 13.4). So it is better to conclude with the majority of interpreters that the transformation in 3.18, like that of 1.8-11, is an ongoing transformation into the image of Christ.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>414</sup> See e.g. Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 186 and Duff, *Corinth*, 204-08. Μεταμορφώω is likewise used to describe Jesus's transfiguration (Mt. 17.2; Mk. 9.2).

<sup>415</sup> See e.g. Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 589-91 and Peter E. Enns, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 586-88.

<sup>416</sup> Belleville, *Glory*, 280-86.

<sup>417</sup> This is the conclusion of e.g. Lambrecht, 'Transformation', 254; Harris, *Corinthians*, 315; Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 183-5.

This reference to transformation in 3.18 becomes even more relevant when the apostle begins to discuss glory in paradoxical terms. Paul proceeds with the proclamation that he is interested in inward renewal that leads to glory and knowledge which is 'shone in our hearts' by God in Christ (4.6a). He then culminates with the 'treasure in jars of clay', where interpreters agree that this image is deeply paradoxical and the 'treasure' relates to the glory discussed in 3.1-4.6.<sup>418</sup> So Lambrecht rightly concludes regarding 3.18, 'The most unusual aspect of this ongoing process of transformation into Christ, the glorious image of God, is its paradoxical character, not only in the minister but in every Christian'.<sup>419</sup> This suggests not only that Paul's discourse on 4.7-15 will focus on transformation, but that the paradox of strength in weakness more generally relates to personal transformation. As seen in 1.8-11, the proto-paradox possesses a *transformative function*. The following section considers 4.7-15 and its expression of the transformation that results from strength in weakness.

## VI. An Overview of 2 Corinthians 4.7-15

This passage begins with one of the distinctive metaphors of 2 Corinthians: the treasure (θησαυρός) in jars of clay (ἐν ὀστρακίνοις σκεύεσιν) (v. 7a). I agree with the majority of interpreters who understand this image to refer to Paul's possession of the gospel in a suffering body.<sup>420</sup> The apostle's 'poor appearance' is one of the characteristics maligned by the Corinthians (10.10). But rather than denying their claim, Paul agrees that his body is a worthless clay jar.<sup>421</sup> The crucial caveat is that he still holds something of

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<sup>418</sup> E.g. Savage, *Weakness*, 164-67; Thrall, *Corinthians*, 1:320-35; Harris, *Corinthians*, 339-41.

<sup>419</sup> Lambrecht, 'Transformation', 254.

<sup>420</sup> This is the majority view (see e.g. Barrett, *Corinthians*, 138 and Savage, *Weakness*, 166), although some interpreters (e.g. Hughes, *Corinthians*, 135) suggest that the treasure refers to inward enlightenment (4.6), and others (e.g. Bultmann, *Corinthians*, 114) believe that it is the ministry of the gospel. But these options do not really differ, given that each concerns the gospel (so Harris, *Corinthians*, 339).

<sup>421</sup> See the overview on the worthlessness of jars in antiquity by Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 165-75.

value. His inferior body lies in tension with his internal possession of the good news of Jesus Christ (4.1-6).<sup>422</sup> This dynamic bears resemblance to certain Hebraic metaphors (e.g. Jer. 32.14), as well as the Stoic paradox that only the wise man is beautiful (i.e. even when his external appearance is marred).<sup>423</sup> What is more striking, however, is how this metaphor represents a development of the proto-paradox in 1.8-11. The treasure and jars of clay represent strength and weakness respectively—a reality recognized by both Savage and Lim.<sup>424</sup> The treasure signals divine glory and the knowledge of God, whereas the jars suggest an easily broken body. The apostle places these contrasted realities in a particular relationship in v. 7a: 'We have this treasure in [ἐν] jars of clay.' The spatial precision of ἐν suggests that the treasure exists *within* the jars. It is not placed alongside them, and Paul does not suggest elsewhere that it can be separated from them. The pairing of these entities is stronger than the mere sequence of death to life that accompanies the affliction in Asia. The treasure and the jars—though they represent opposing realities—are necessarily found together and thus create a single image. How then should one describe Paul's logic in 4.7a?

## VII. The Meaning of the Treasure in Jars of Clay

### *i. A Co-inherent Paradox: Envisioning the Relationship Between Strength and Weakness*

The common currency of scholarship on the relationship between the treasure and the jars is the term 'contrast' or an equivalent.<sup>425</sup> This is a fair description because, as

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<sup>422</sup> There is some debate regarding the meaning of the image: is Paul contrasting the worth or the fragility of the treasure and the jars? The latter view is held by Jacques Dupont, 'Le Chrétien: Miroir de La Gloire Divine D'après 2 Cor 3:18', *RB* 56, no. 3 (July 1949): 121-122; Allo, *Corinthiens*, 113; Jean Héring, *The Second Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. A.W. Heathcote and P.J. Allock (London: Epworth Press, 1967), 32. The former notably by Barrett, *Corinthians*, 137-8 and Philipp Bachmann, *Der Zweite Briefe Des Paulus an Die Korinther*, KNT, VIII (Leipzig: Deichert, 1909), 194-6. I agree with Savage, *Weakness*, 165-166 that both are correct (i.e. worth and fragility are inherently related).

<sup>423</sup> For more on the senses of Stoic paradox, see Cicero, *Paradoxa*, 8-23.

<sup>424</sup> Savage, *Weakness*, 164-65 and Lim, *Sufferings*, 103.

<sup>425</sup> See e.g. Hanson, *Paradox*, 112; Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 254; Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 182.

suggested above, there is some level of contrast between these two entities. In fact, a crucial feature of Pauline paradox is typically the use of two contrasted terms (cf. Gal 5.13; 1 Cor. 1.21).<sup>426</sup> But a contrast only communicates *opposition* whereas the treasure and the jars are able to *co-exist* given Paul's use of ἐν in v. 7a. The treasure exists within the jars, not apart from them. The paradoxical relationship presses even deeper than this: although one could choose to analyze either the treasure or the jars, Paul does not allow either entity to gain prominence. The treasure is not shining through the vessel nor does the vessel prevent one from perceiving the treasure. In this sense, the treasure in jars of clay is the first developed paradox of 2 Corinthians. According to Hotze's definition—which I utilized with respect to the affliction in Asia (1.8-11)—this means that the metaphor consists of two contradictory entities that are simultaneously true.<sup>427</sup> This model is helpful in the sense that it preserves the co-existence of the treasure and the jars and their contrasted nature.

But a difficulty with this definition is its inability to describe the strong sense of *interdependence* implied by the treasure in jars of clay. The treasure's location within the jars means that it informs how one views the jars and *vice versa* (i.e. a set of jars is more valuable when containing treasure). As Keller says, in a paradox 'the opposite words' are 'joined, mingled, or identified'.<sup>428</sup> Although this assertion is vague, it rightly suggests that Paul's possession of the gospel needs to be understood with respect to his suffering body. The apostle stresses elsewhere that the gospel can only be received in the proper redemptive context: it is meant to help those struggling under the burden of sin and death (e.g. Rom. 5.6, 17; cf. 1 Tim. 1.15). In light of the Corinthian conviction that strength and weakness cannot co-exist (e.g. 10.10, 12-18), Paul applies his gospel in another context which nonetheless retains the *incongruity* between the gospel and its receiver: the apostle

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<sup>426</sup> See e.g. Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 78-138 and Plank, 'Paradoxical', 131.

<sup>427</sup> Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 35.

<sup>428</sup> Keller, *Paradoxes*, 13.

possesses the gospel in his *weakness*. The treasure is irreducibly connected to the jars. However, this does not mean that weakness is required to receive and understand the gospel. Paul only suggests that it is a ground on which he knows the gospel—it causes him to dwell deeply upon God's redemptive work in Christ (e.g. Phil. 1.12-4; Rom. 5.3-5).<sup>429</sup> Without the sense of desperation and need produced by the jars, the gospel ceases to be the treasure that it is otherwise meant to be. But far from being a sadistic vision, Paul believes that the gospel simultaneously qualifies and improves his weakness in the sense that he does not have a clay jar alone, but a treasure too. This means that the treasure and the jars are not only simultaneous realities nor do they simply co-exist. They qualify or define one another to the point that they are components of the other's existence. Paul does not know the gospel apart from his weakness, and he cannot properly understand his weakness without the gospel. Such observations are virtually non-existent in the literature, as will be shown below,<sup>430</sup> leading to the conclusion that interpreters have misunderstood the Pauline relationship between strength and weakness. The exception is an overlooked article by Plank, where he comments that Pauline paradox is 'dyadic' and 'retains seriousness about both its terms.'<sup>431</sup> He adds, 'the coexistence of contraries implies the perpetual and mutual qualification of both terms of the paradox.'<sup>432</sup> Plank provides what is arguably a perfect description of the relationship between the treasure and the jars of clay.

Yet for all of Plank's helpfulness in clarifying how the treasure relates to the jars, he does not offer a concise description of Pauline paradox, let alone an alternative to the prevailing use of 'contrast' to describe the relationship between the treasure and jars of

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<sup>429</sup> These passages do not *directly* support my argument as they are not sufficiently paradoxical. They do, however, show the close relationship Paul envisions between personal suffering and the advancement of his gospel, both in his communities and within himself. In other situations, Paul might recognize that one could be perfectly content—without an ounce of suffering—and grasp the gospel. But this is not Paul's emphasis in 4.7a, where he is writing to a community that rejects weakness wherever possible.

<sup>430</sup> My discussion of current approaches to 2 Cor. 4.7a begins on p. 125 below.

<sup>431</sup> Plank, 'Paradoxical', 131.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

clay. Is there a term that could capture the intricacies of Paul's logic and thus drive the field forward? This is a difficult proposition—given that one word can only say so much—yet it is equally vital for understanding Paul's argument. As discussed earlier, the Corinthians are oscillating between experiences of pride and despair (10.10; cf. 2.1-7), meanwhile Paul has shown the community how he once possessed deep weaknesses that appear set apart from strength (1.8-11). For individuals who have felt 'the sentence of death' (1.9), how they might be able to access spiritual life and strength is an issue of great significance. So it is precisely in the *particularities* of the relationship between the treasure and the jars that one might unlock the transformative power of paradox for Paul's argument.

One might suggest that 'co-ordinated contrasts' or 'conjoined opposites' describes the Pauline relationship between strength and weakness. But these phrases still fail to summarize the relationship in one word. Perhaps the best possible term for describing the relationship between the treasure and the jars is *co-inherence*. Although this term has its roots in the Christological and Trinitarian debates of the patristic period—which are not unrelated to some aspects of the strength in weakness paradox—I employ it here purely as a heuristic device.<sup>433</sup> By re-applying the term in this context and thus investing it with fresh meaning, it sheds light on the complexities of the strength in weakness paradox.<sup>434</sup> In particular, the term is specially crafted to capture how separate and distinct entities can interpenetrate one another without conflation. This is useful in my study of Paul's paradoxes because, for instance, if the treasure were to be removed from the jars, the metaphor would lose one of its two entities. Even more than that, each entity would lose

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<sup>433</sup> For more on its historic use, see e.g. 'Perichoresis', *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 207 and G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1952), 282-301. On the intricate relationships of the Trinity, see Wesley Hill, *Paul and the Trinity: Persons, Relations, and the Pauline Letters* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2015), 30-48.

<sup>434</sup> A special strength of the term co-inherence is its prefix, which allows for the mutual qualification aspect of the strength in weakness paradox.

some of its character because it is no longer defined by the entity to which it is opposed. This suggests that by re-defining *co-inherence* for the purposes of my argument, it captures dynamics of the strength in weakness paradox that the term *contrast* does not.

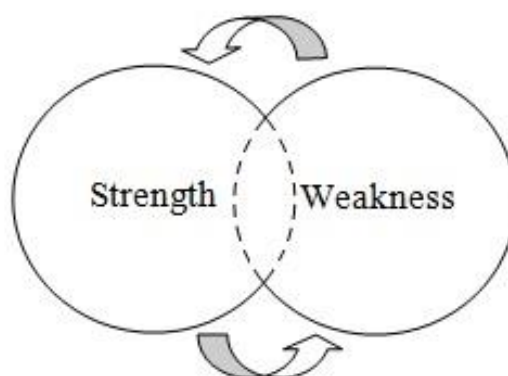
To be more precise about what a co-inherent paradox entails in 2 Corinthians, I propose that it includes the following elements: 1) there must be two contrasted entities or experiences, which 2) are occurring at the same time and 3) are mutually qualifying one another to the point that one entity is incomplete without the other. Although one could suggest that the proto-paradox has a measure of co-inherence because its sequence requires one contrasting entity to closely follow the other (i.e. life proceeds from death in 1.8-11), I reserve this term exclusively for those moments where Paul refers to both simultaneity and mutual qualification. This means that the distinguishing factor of the most developed paradoxes in 2 Corinthians is the co-inherent relationship between strength and weakness. The basic advantage that this concept brings for understanding Paul's argument is that it insists, more than other terms and concepts, that strength can be received during one's weakness without conflating the two realities. Furthermore, it suggests that even the deepest weaknesses can be components of true strength.<sup>435</sup> The logic of co-inherence is illustrated below, where the arrows represent the mutually qualifying nature of strength and weakness. They remain separate entities, and the middle space between them does not represent shared content; rather, it communicates the interdependence of these contrasted realities.

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<sup>435</sup> This is supported by the treasure in jars of clay, but Paul does not fully develop this possibility until 6.3-13. See sec. V of Ch. 4.



Figure 2: The Co-Inherence of Strength in Weakness



While identifying the treasure in jars of clay as a co-inherent paradox makes it easier to conceptualize the relationship between strength and weakness, it ironically causes the task of interpretation to become more prone to error. A well-defined paradox is a complex literary device.<sup>436</sup> Plank rightly says, 'Simmering within the deep structures of a text, paradox can erupt to wreak havoc upon an author's intention. The problem that paradox creates is similar to that of the text which says, "trust absolutely no one": no reader can accept such a statement without violating the very thing it calls for.'<sup>437</sup> Plank probably goes too far at the end of his comment as paradoxes of various kinds were not uncommon in antiquity.<sup>438</sup> So Paul would have expected the Corinthians to have some means of understanding the logic of the treasure in jars of clay. One should likewise expect modern interpreters to attend to the unique relationship between the treasure and jars, but oversights and problematic interpretations abound within the literature.

## ii. Contemporary Scholarship's Resolution of the Paradox

A common error concerning the logic of the strength in weakness paradox is an over-emphasis on strength, allowing weakness to become temporary or a lesser point of

<sup>436</sup> One does well to learn from Overbeck's perception that Marcion's love for paradox drove him to some of his most radical conclusions: 'Paul had only one student who understood him, Marcion, and this student misunderstood him' (*Christentum und Kultur* [Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1919], 218-19).

<sup>437</sup> Plank, 'Paradoxical', 132.

<sup>438</sup> I say more about this on p. 140-41 below. Also see Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 45-58.

emphasis.<sup>439</sup> For instance, we may note Kaithakottil's description of the treasure in jars of clay: 'Paul experiences hardships (thesis) and deliverance (anti-thesis) in his apostolic life.'<sup>440</sup> This explanation bears more similarities to Hegelian dialectic than Pauline paradox, implied by the terms 'thesis' and 'anti-thesis', which allow for one contrasted entity to ultimately prevail over the other.<sup>441</sup> This occurs for Kaithakottil when she concludes that one's weaknesses bring about the 'anticipation' of eschatological life and do not qualify present strength in any respect.<sup>442</sup> Stegman likewise comments on 4.7: 'It is easy to doubt ourselves in moments of discouragement and failure, real or apparent. Paul, however, reminds us that we *do* have a precious treasure, the treasure of the gospel....Rather than despair, we are invited to rely even more on God's grace so that we can share with others the treasure we have received.'<sup>443</sup> Ultimately, this viewpoint reduces strength in weakness into a strength motif: weaknesses are recognized, but they are a 'ruse' in the sense that they receive significance only as means to strength.<sup>444</sup>

The inverse mistake is also committed, although not nearly as frequently.<sup>445</sup> Guthrie takes Paul's 'emphasis' in 4.7 to be 'on the idea of fragility...and perhaps the unassuming ordinariness of clay containers.'<sup>446</sup> Not only does this interpretation favour weakness over strength, the mere use of the term 'emphasis' already signifies that insufficient care has

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<sup>439</sup> See e.g. Harris, *Corinthians*, 339; Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 201; Savage, *Weakness*, 189.

<sup>440</sup> Joyce Kaithakottil, "'Death in Us, Life in You': Ministry and Suffering: A Study of 2Cor 4, 7-15", *Bible Bhashyam* 28, no. 2 (2002): 443.

<sup>441</sup> For more on Hegelian paradox in relation to Paul, see Diogenes Allen, 'The Paradox of Freedom and Authority', *Theology Today* 36, no. 2 (July 1979): 167-75. To be fair, Kaithakottil recognizes that Paul's point in 4.7-12 is the recurrence of life and death rather than a linear movement from one to the other. But her language betrays her when she says that 'Paul sees the success of his apostolic life in the power of God' or she refers to the 'inseparable unity of power and weakness' (p. 458).

<sup>442</sup> Kaithakottil, 'Death', 459.

<sup>443</sup> Stegman, *Corinthians*, 106. The italics are the author's.

<sup>444</sup> John Caputo, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 84. Despite Caputo's radical conclusions, he is very helpful in perceiving this scholarly tendency.

<sup>445</sup> See e.g. Lim, *Sufferings*, 100-02 and Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 30, 293. One could argue that Luther also made this error in relation to 2 Cor. 4.7a, see e.g. LW 12:150 (*Commentary on Psalm 23*).

<sup>446</sup> Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 253.

been given to discerning the intricate structure of the metaphor. As argued above, Paul's placement of the treasure within the jars suggests that neither entity can gain precedent.

A different kind of error is present in Aejmelaeneus's belief that 'weakness is strength' in 2 Cor. 10-13.<sup>447</sup> He suggests that Paul's rhetorical strategy is to reverse claims about his weaknesses by turning them into positives.<sup>448</sup> This line of reasoning is also utilized by Pickett, among others, who refers to Paul's 'positive evaluation of weakness and suffering'.<sup>449</sup> The paradox certainly leads to a positive function for weakness in some sense—it contributes to new knowledge, emotions, and behaviour—but it nonetheless remains the opposite of strength. Aejmelaeneus and Pickett press too far by equating strength with weakness and thus overlooking the need for contrast within a paradox.

Another unique error is found in Waters' study, where he describes a paradox as two truths that combine to create 'a third truth that overrides the first and second truths'.<sup>450</sup> But this transforms the paradox into a proposition. It is no longer two truths in tension, but one truth alone. This model does not capture the logic of Pauline paradox in 4.7a because it does not recognize its relational dynamic—it can only exist with two entities that are opposed yet simultaneous.

Unfortunately, Hotze seems to deconstruct his own concept of paradox—utilized previously for the proto-paradox in 1.8-11—when he portrays paradox as the theological contrast between 'experience' and 'revelation'.<sup>451</sup> He goes on to explain, 'Wo menschliche

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<sup>447</sup> Aejmelaeneus, *Schwachheit*, 400. A similar mistake is made by Güttgemanns, *Apostel*, 122-123 when he refers to 'life' in 4.7-12 as the '*Epiphanie*' of 'death', and describes how weakness appears as power. This shape-shifting understanding of the paradox implies that there is only one operative entity and not two. A similar mistake is found in Gräbe, 'Power', *NeoT* 28, no. 1 (1994): 147-56. On p. 151, Gräbe argues that 'weakness and power constitute an inseparable unity'.

<sup>448</sup> Aejmelaeneus, *Schwachheit*, 400-401.

<sup>449</sup> Pickett, *Cross*, 135.

<sup>450</sup> Larry J. Waters, 'Paradoxes in the Pauline Epistles', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167, no. 668 (October 2010): 423-41.

<sup>451</sup> Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 342.

Empirie und Logik mit der Botschaft des Evangeliums kollidieren, oder umgekehrt, wo das Kerygma dem Vorverständnis weltlicher Wahrnehmung und Denkweise widerspricht, dort bilden sich Paradoxien.<sup>452</sup> While the paradox of strength in weakness certainly does contradict the Corinthians' understanding, Hotze's perspective reduces the paradox to a contradiction. There is no overarching sense in which strength is co-inherent, or mutually defined by, weakness. The paradox is merely a conflict between opposing perspectives.

All of the mistakes above are significant in light of the Corinthians' polarity of strength or weakness. As Paul pens 2 Corinthians, the community is experiencing strength and weakness as antithetical realities and is thus despairing of the apparent chasm between their experience of pain (2.1-7) and their slowly-fading belief that they are superior to Paul (10.12-18; 11.1-6). Their chosen method of response—to viciously attack Paul's weaknesses—is deeply troubling because it is fuelled by insecurities stemming from their weaknesses (1.3-7; 10.9).<sup>453</sup> The modern error of overemphasizing either strength or weakness would play dangerously into the Corinthians' hands because it unhinges the paradoxical bond between strength and weakness and makes it possible for the community to continue wallowing in their loss of identity as 'the strong'. While the reversal described by Aejmelaneus and Pickett, as well as Waters' 'third proposition' model, could inject strength into the community, this runs the risk of exacerbating the Corinthians' obsession with strength or overlooking how much they are suffering. A depressed community is unlikely to be inspired by being told that they mistake their vulnerabilities for power!

It is now apparent that the result of the errors above is the resolution of Paul's argument, and thus of the strength in weakness paradox itself. One must take seriously the intricate nature of the treasure in jars of clay. It does not overemphasize either entity, it is

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<sup>452</sup> Ibid.

<sup>453</sup> See sec. IV.ii of Ch. 2.

not a contrast, it does not conflate weakness with strength, nor does it replace these opposites with a new, third truth.<sup>454</sup> Rather, the paradox is a co-inherent reality in which strength and weakness are opposed, but also mutually qualify one another. Weakness thus becomes a component of every act of strength and *vice versa*. This transforms the Corinthians' situation by providing them with the knowledge that, in the midst of despair, God incorporates their trials into their life together in Christ. Weakness is not an existential detour, and there is no chasm between strength and weakness despite the opposite nature of these realities. In this sense, the term 'paradox' is a redemptive shorthand in the Corinthian context. It is designed to speak into a weakened community that is engaged in the futile exercise of destroying any and all weaknesses (i.e. the polarity of strength or weakness). But Paul mercifully seeks to demonstrate that there is a pathway out of their darkness that involves darkness itself. They can discover Paul's experience of strength in weakness, but the apostle himself will not make this pathway to redemption clearer until 4.15.<sup>455</sup>

### *iii. A More Theological Error: Presenting the Paradox as a Zero-Sum Game*

Having described the misrepresentations of paradoxical co-inherence—a largely literary phenomenon so far—one must address a different, though still important, way in which modern analyses deconstruct Paul's presentation of strength in weakness. In what is perhaps the most prevalent interpretive error in 2 Cor. 4.7, many interpreters understand the paradox to be a contrast between *human* weakness and *divine* strength.<sup>456</sup> Savage is representative when he claims, 'It is only in Paul's weakness that the power may be of

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<sup>454</sup> This litany of errors could have been partly avoided had the field given attention to the only major English work on Pauline paradox: Keller's *Some Paradoxes of Paul*. On p. 68, he notes several terms which do *not* encapsulate a paradox, including prevalent terms in the field like 'contradiction' and 'antithesis'.

<sup>455</sup> See p. 144-48 below.

<sup>456</sup> E.g. Lim, *Sufferings*, 102-3; Barrett, *Corinthians*, 138-9; Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 182-3. To be fair, this *appears* to be Paul's logic in v. 4.7b. For my interpretation of v. 7b, see p. 120-25 above.

God.<sup>457</sup> This model of the paradox tries to capture how weakness reveals God's strength in a manner that cannot be accomplished by other ways of being (i.e. being humanly strong). The issue here rests with the division of agency, wherein God contributes strength to the paradox while humanity alone brings weakness.<sup>458</sup> This seems like an untenable position in light of Christ's participation in human weakness on the cross (e.g. 13.4, cf. 1 Cor. 1.10-25): the incarnation prevents the division of strength and weakness to God and humanity respectively.

A deeper difficulty with the common interpretation given above is that it renders the paradox easily resolvable by portraying God and humanity as equals who exist within a competitive relationship. God gives power and humanity gives weakness, thus making the paradox a contrast of two items within the same, comparable class (e.g. the difference between male and female). Such a reading of the treasure in jars of clay leaves no room for the strength in weakness paradox to be truly paradoxical: *it is not taken to originate from a reality that is totally alien to human experience*. This sort of paradoxical resolution has been a concern in the quest to explain the relationship between God and creation.<sup>459</sup> The transcendence of God is not protected if he is merely one being among others in creation. One has to specify that the divine is a class unto itself. Likewise, the strength in weakness paradox cannot be given by God as an irresolvable tension if it does not possess its own unique character. Tanner explains: 'This relationship of total giver to total gift is possible, in turn, only if God and creatures are, so to speak, on different levels of being, and different planes of causality—something that God's transcendence implies.'<sup>460</sup> Although

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<sup>457</sup> Savage, *Weakness*, 166-67.

<sup>458</sup> I will further address this problem in sec. IV.v of Ch. 5.

<sup>459</sup> I thank Prof. Karen Kilby for this observation and for pointing me to the work of Tanner (cited below). Also see Simon Oliver, *Creation: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 35-61.

<sup>460</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 3. Also see Tanner's *God and Creation in Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2004).

more could be said at this point, I mention Tanner's argument to illustrate that, by assigning only power to God, interpreters place the divine and the human in a zero-sum game when a paradox's existence is predicated upon God contributing to more than one of its dimensions. The whole entity has to be given by God, and it descends into earthly reality—another class of being entirely—as a divine, alien phenomenon. Without this, there is no theological paradox.

Lest one think that this model for God's transcendence is foreign to 2 Corinthians, one must recall that the apostle repeatedly asserts a pragmatic difference between God and humanity.<sup>461</sup> Paul is incapable of attending to his circumstances (e.g. 1.8-9a) whereas God is able to do so (e.g. 1.9b-10). The apostle summarizes: 'We are not competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God' (3.5). So there is a contrast between God and humanity, although it is not within the paradox itself; rather, it relates to the real-life competencies of each and God's ability to enact the paradox where human ingenuity fails. When Paul forms a paradox, it is not a description of the difference between God and humanity. Instead, it is a reflection of what only God can do to liberate the apostle and the Corinthians from their polarity of strength or weakness. As Martyn says, '[Paul] begins, as it were, on a different planet, argues, therefore, with a different frame of reference...and ends his argument by anticipating that through it God will bring the [Corinthians] to that strange and wondrous land that served as his point of departure.'<sup>462</sup>

But how could a divine reality enter the human realm and, so to speak, roam the streets of Corinth? My suggestion is that this could only occur if the paradox is imbued with humanity *by the choice of God himself*. It is possible for the paradox to descend into

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<sup>461</sup> For a more thorough description of this difference, see p. 106-08 above.

<sup>462</sup> Martyn, 'Galatia', 162. He is referring here to the Galatians, but I have inserted the Corinthian community because this particular statement is very similar to the point I am making.

the human realm because Jesus, the Son of God, chose to take on human flesh (e.g. 4.6; 13.4; Phil. 2.6-7). Paul holds him to be a God-man, stating that Jesus 'as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, [and] who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead' (Rom. 1.3-4).<sup>463</sup> In this sense, the paradox is a divine-human reality, not in the sense that God and humanity are contrasted, but in the sense that the paradox is deeply Christological. Paul nonetheless asserts elsewhere that the Godhead generally possesses weakness: 'the weakness of God [τὸ ἄσθενές τοῦ θεοῦ] is stronger than humanity's strength' (1 Cor. 1.25). So, once again, it makes little sense to view the paradox as a contrast between divine power and human weakness.

All of the conversation above about protecting God's transcendence is helpful for gaining perspective on Paul's pastoral approach to Corinth because, as concluded previously, the community is in the midst of a struggle with λύπη, which is a deeply human problem that cannot be easily solved.<sup>464</sup> If they were to add their weakness to the paradox, it would contribute absolutely nothing to its transformative function. What the Corinthians need is a divine intervention: to understand that their pains are actually controlled and given by God, and being related to strength in such a way that there can be a pathway forward in their conflict with Paul. As a result, Christ appears here as the Corinthians' saviour, wielding the strength in weakness paradox, and so moving the community 'off the grid' of their polarized understanding in search of a radical transformation. It is now time to

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<sup>463</sup> I agree with interpreters who support the traditional, Niceno-Constantinopolitan understanding of Jesus's two natures (i.e. human and divine) as a legitimate extrapolation from Paul's Christology. See e.g. Chris Tilling, *Paul's Divine Christology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2015) and Michael F. Bird et al., *How God Became Jesus: The Real Origins of Belief in Jesus' Divine Nature---A Response to Bart Ehrman* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), esp. 94-116.

<sup>464</sup> See sec. IV.ii of Ch. 2.



shift to v. 4.7b, and then v. 8-12, where Paul will begin to show precisely what kind of transformation Christ enacts through the strength in weakness paradox.

#### *iv. Summary*

I began this section by noting the intricate relationship between the treasure and the jars of clay (v. 7a). I agree with the existing literature which takes the treasure to refer to the glorious gospel (cf. 4.1-6) whereas the jars of clay refers to Paul's weak body (e.g. 10.10). Interpreters run into trouble, however, when they describe the metaphor using only the term 'contrast' or an equivalent. The treasure exists within the jars, not merely apart from them. In fact, the treasure's location within the jars means that it informs how one views the jars and *vice versa* (i.e. a set of jars is more valuable when containing treasure). So these two opposing entities not only *co-exist*, there is some sense in which they are *interdependent*. Building upon Plank's study, I suggest that the field has failed to appreciate the complexity of this metaphor. I propose that the relationship it envisions between strength and weakness is only sufficiently understood by borrowing the term *co-inherence* from Trinitarian theology and re-defining its meaning as follows: 1) there are two contrasted entities or experiences, which 2) are occurring at the same time and 3) are mutually qualifying one another to the point that one entity is incomplete without the other. This is the Pauline understanding of the relationship between strength and weakness.

Utilizing the concept of co-inherence to appreciate the complexity of the strength in weakness paradox, I survey contemporary scholarship's reading of the relationship between these two entities with a special focus on the treasure in jars of clay. I observe that interpreters routinely resolve the paradox by overemphasizing one of strength or weakness; by conflating the two; by combining them into a third, propositional truth; or again, by suggesting that they are simply in a contradictory relationship. The most common

resolution of the paradox is the assertion that the paradox involves *human* weakness and *divine* strength. This is problematic because it treats God like one being among others in creation which, with reference to Tanner's concept of transcendence, is an inadequate view of divine reality. In order for the paradox to be truly paradoxical, both strength and weakness must be given by God in their instantiation in human reality. This model of transcendence is supported in 2 Corinthians by the pragmatic difference between God and humanity: God can accomplish feats that humanity cannot (3.5; 4.7b; 12.9). So it is only by giving the paradox through the God-man, Jesus Christ—the decision of this transcendent God—that the paradox can enter human reality. All of the above matters for the Corinthians because, if one unwinds the co-inherence of strength and weakness—especially by emphasizing one or the other—it re-affirms their antithetical view of strength and weakness. In fact, the community needs a transcendent paradox because of the depths of their pain. So when contemporary interpreters resolve the paradox, they not only fail to appreciate the literary and theological dimensions of Paul's argument, they actually risk undoing its pastoral effectiveness, which is to create a radical transformation of one's self in 4.8-12.

## VIII. The Ensuing Transformation: The Effects of the Treasure in Jars of Clay and the Introduction of Intrusive Grace

### *i. Giving Credit Where Credit is Due (v. 4.7b)*

Before considering 4.8-12 and the exact nature of the transformation that Paul gestures towards, one must address the clause in v. 7b. Here the apostle follows his proclamation of paradox with a terse description of its purpose. He says, 'We have this treasure in jars of clay, so that [ἵνα] the surpassing power [ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως] belongs [ᾧ] to God and not to us' (4.7). The majority of interpreters envision an implied

verb: the treasure in jars of clay exists 'to show' that power belongs to God (given the use of φανερώω in v. 10).<sup>465</sup> It is worth noting that this assumption favours a revelatory understanding of the paradox, even if this categorization is not typically employed here. This suggests that Paul's bodily weaknesses are the site at which God's power is *most visible*. As established above, it is certainly true that the direct referents for the treasure in jars of clay are Paul's weak body and his knowledge of Christ's glorious gospel. But whether the clause in v. 4b indicates a *revealing* of God's power is far more difficult to determine given the ambiguity of the text. Furthermore, it seems unconventional to insert φανερώω when this verb is only used *after* v. 7b and not *before*.<sup>466</sup> An alternative way of reading this clause is to take seriously that Paul's sentence does not end in v. 7b; rather, it continues through v. 8ff.<sup>467</sup> The grammar requires one to read forward in search of the clause's meaning as much, if not more, than how much one takes the clause to be looking backward as an interpretation of the treasure in jars of clay. It is as though Paul says that the paradox was given 'so that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us, in as much as we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed....' Minor comments, 'Paul will spend the next part of the letter expanding on this key thought [from v. 7b].'<sup>468</sup> In other words, Paul explains why the paradox (not just his weaknesses) testifies to God's power: it achieves things that are impossible without God, such as being 'afflicted' but not 'crushed' (v. 8) (i.e. simultaneously both weak and strong).

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<sup>465</sup> See e.g. Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 174; Schmeller, *Korinther*, I:256; and Barnett, *Corinthians*, 227.

<sup>466</sup> Savage, *Weakness*, 166 rightly questions the insertion of φανερώω in v. 7b and suggests that the verse should be read as it is written.

<sup>467</sup> This is noted by Long, *Corinthians*, 86. Although this does not mean that one can ignore v. 7a and focus only on the connection between v. 7b and v. 8ff, it does suggest that the content of v. 8ff must inform how one understands v. 7b and, consequently, v. 7a. This supports the conclusion that I reach below.

<sup>468</sup> Mitzi L. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishers, 2009), 88. Also see Ambrosiaster, *1-2 Corinthians*, 221.

The greatest difficulty with my interpretation of v. 7b, however, is that it could be accused of being a convenient reading that overlooks contradictions with the paradoxical logic established in v. 7a. Paul appears to be saying that 'power' comes from God and 'weakness' from humanity. Hafemann comments, 'The purpose clause in 4.7b seems to indicate that the point of contrast is God's power, so that the intention of the image is to highlight the weakness of Paul.'<sup>469</sup> But one needs to be clear on the kind of power in view in v. 7b: Paul refers to a ὑπερβολή τῆς δυνάμεως rather than an unqualified strength that could be paradoxically related to weakness. This suggests that Paul is not envisioning God giving one part to the paradox and humanity another. Rather, the whole paradox of the treasure and the jars is the initiative of God (and enacted in the God-man Jesus), and this testifies to the totally alien and transcendent power of God which transforms those in Christ. One also needs to consider Paul's presentation of the paradox in v. 8-12, where he reverts to the life-death motif of 1.8-11. Rather than discussing how God brings life amidst death, Paul states that it is both 'the life of Jesus [ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ]' and 'the death of Jesus [τὴν νέκρωσιν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ]' that he carries in his body (v. 10). So the paradox cannot be reduced to a contrast between God and humanity. An interpretation of v. 7b that allows one to avoid this problem is to view the ἵνα clause as giving 'credit' to God for the results of the paradox rather than specifying the resolution of the paradox by attributing power to God and weakness to humanity.<sup>470</sup>

*ii. Turning Paul Inside Out: The Return of the Death and Life Pattern (v. 8-12)*

Paul's transition to an explanation of the paradox's impact on his life takes the form of a brief suffering catalogue. It contains a mixture of external and internal realities: 'We

<sup>469</sup> Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 182. Also e.g. Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:324 and Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 205.

<sup>470</sup> Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 168-69. Also see e.g. Barnett, *Corinthians*, 231 and Harris, *Corinthians*, 340-41.

are afflicted [θλίβω] in every way, yet not crushed [στενοχορέω]; perplexed [ἀπορέω], yet not driven to despair [ἐξαπορέω]; persecuted [διώκω], yet not forsaken [ἐγκαταλείπω]; struck down [καταβάλλω], yet not destroyed [ἀπόλλυμι] (v. 8-9). This enumeration of Paul's struggles is similar to the Cynic-Stoic diatribe.<sup>471</sup> Epictetus says that a true Stoic is one 'who though sick [νοσέω] is happy, though in danger [κινδυνεύω] is happy, though dying [ἀποθνήσκω] is happy...though in disrepute [ἄδοξέω] is happy.'<sup>472</sup> But Savage is correct to note that the 'pathos' of v. 8-9 derives more from the 'acute anxieties of personal experience than from any literary form.'<sup>473</sup> This does not go far enough, however, as my earlier analysis of Paul's grammar noted that v. 7-10 constitutes a single sentence. In fact, Paul does not provide a verb in the suffering catalogue (v. 8-9), choosing instead to use a series of participles. The main action occurs earlier with the ἔχομεν (v. 7), that is, Paul's possession of the treasure in jars of clay. So each experience in v. 8-9 is derived from the paradox. Of special interest, Paul refers to not being 'forsaken [ἐγκαταλειπόμενοι]'—a term that implies great relational pain<sup>474</sup>—before mentioning his escape from a state of despair (ἐξαπορούμενοι) (v. 9). Along with another suffering term (i.e. θλίβω), these confirm that Paul is tracing an emotional transformation which, despite attention to this passage from Savage and others, has gone largely unnoticed.<sup>475</sup> The paradox of strength in weakness does not simply concern a tension between one's inner knowledge and outer appearance (i.e. the treasure in jars of clay). Instead, the paradox lodges itself throughout the whole of one's life, especially in one's emotions. The conspicuous characteristic of this

<sup>471</sup> For further discussion, see e.g. Savage, *Weakness*, 170 and Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 166-79.

<sup>472</sup> Epictetus *Dis.* 2.19.24. Also see e.g. Sen. *Ep.* 71.26; *Dial.* 2.10.4; Philo *Spec. Leg.* 3.6.

<sup>473</sup> Savage, *Weakness*, 170. Also see Jan Lambrecht, 'The Nekrōsis of Jesus: Ministry and Suffering in 2 Cor 4,7-15', in *Apôtre Paul: Personnalité, Style et Conception Du Ministère* (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1986), 120-43.

<sup>474</sup> See e.g. Rom. 9.29, 2 Tim 4.10, 16 and 'ἐγκαταλείπω', BDAG (3rd ed.), 273.

<sup>475</sup> Some interpreters have recently suggested that Paul employs military imagery in v. 6-8. See e.g. Lisa M. Bowens, 'Investigating the Apocalyptic Texture of Paul's Martial Imagery in 2 Corinthians 4-6', *JSNT* 39, no. 1 (September 2016): 3-15 and James R Unwin, "'Thrown Down but Not Destroyed": Paul's Use of a Spectacle Metaphor in 2 Corinthians 4:7-15', *NovT* 57, no. 4 (2015): 379-412. Far from conflicting with my proposal, this background only furthers the sense of intensity and passion in these verses.

transformation is that it is not a dramatic movement, such as from despair to hope (1.8-11); rather, Paul remains 'perplexed' (v. 8b) and he persists in being 'persecuted' (v. 9a). The apostle is not elucidating a burgeoning liberation of his emotions. The reason for this measured transformation of the emotions might be the sombre note with which the passage climaxes in v. 12.<sup>476</sup> Regardless, these verses show that even when Paul is focused upon himself, he is consciously gearing his experience towards the community. In this case, he makes references to despair and relational strife—which are truly his experiences—but ones that the Corinthians are also feeling alongside their apostle. So, in v. 8-9, Paul models for the Corinthians what an experience of strength in weakness might do for their pains.

The emotional trajectory of the passage then gives way to a life and death motif last seen in 1.8-11. Paul says, 'Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus [τὴν νέκρωσιν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ], so that the life of Jesus [ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ] might also be manifested in our bodies [ἐν τῷ σώματι ἡμῶν]. For we who live are always being delivered to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus might also be manifested in our mortal flesh' (v. 10-11). The apostle's focus on Jesus, especially Christ's dwelling within himself, further proves that the paradox is enacted through participation with Christ.<sup>477</sup> Likewise, many interpreters have concluded that Jesus's ζωὴ and νέκρωσις/θάνατος within Paul are fundamentally the spiritual re-enactment of his death and resurrection.<sup>478</sup> But the co-existence of these two opposing realities has a clear anthropological dimension: the use of the verb φανερώω (v. 10-11) signals Paul's *cognitive realization* that Jesus's life and death are re-enacted in his life.<sup>479</sup> Flowing from Paul's initial breakthrough at the beginning of the passage—

<sup>476</sup> For further discussion of the connection between v. 6-8 and v. 12, see p. 139-43 below.

<sup>477</sup> For a good summary of the connection between Paul and the death and resurrection of Christ in 4.7-12, see C. J. Roetzel, "'As Dying, and Behold We Live': Death and Resurrection in Paul's Theology", *Interpretation* 46, no. 1 (1992): 5-18.

<sup>478</sup> See e.g. Savage, *Weakness*, 172-73 and the extended discussion in Lim, *Sufferings*, 104-12.

<sup>479</sup> E.g. Rom. 1.19 and 1 Cor. 4.5. Also see 'φανερώω', *BDAG* (3rd ed.), 1048.

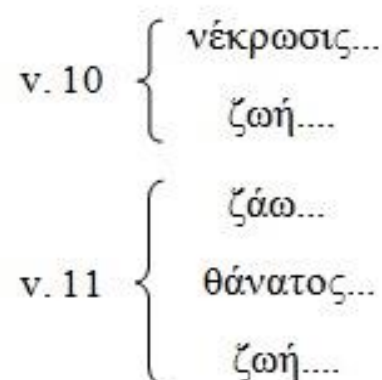
represented by the treasure in jars of clay—he learns that Jesus only embodies strength vis-à-vis his death. In this sense, even Jesus, the object of the glorious good news, can identify with the weak (i.e. those who embody deprivation, loss, and incompetence). This leads to one of the seminal lessons of this passage: far from being inferior for his weaknesses, Paul is actually most like Jesus—not when he is strong and competent—but when he is able to see his sufferings and failures within the pattern of moving from death to life. The apostle's existential death contributes towards experiences of resurrection life (which will be discussed momentarily with respect to v. 12). This underlines a crucial difference between the life-death motif of 4.8-12 and 1.8-11: the paradox of life and death is already at work within Paul, unlike in the affliction in Asia (cf. 1.8).<sup>480</sup> This raises the question: if Paul has now fully grasped the paradox, has it worked a definitive transformation in his life?

But before one can answer this question, a closer inspection of the paradox is necessary. At first glance, it appears that Paul reverts to the sense of sequence in 1.8-11: he carries the death of Jesus *so that* the life of Jesus might be manifested (4.10). But a sequence here may not be Paul's focus.<sup>481</sup> A closer analysis of v. 10-

11 reveals that the apostle does not merely repeat the sequence of v. 10 in v. 11. He moves from death to life, and then from life to death and back to life (as indicated by the figure on the right). Far from emphasizing a single sequence of death to life, the dynamics in v. 10-11 are more representative of a co-inherent paradox—both life and death are closely

related and when one considers a single entity the other must also be considered. In fact,

Figure 3



<sup>480</sup> A difference with the life-death pattern in 4.7-15 is that it has already taken residence within Paul (e.g. v. 10-11). I will discuss this process with respect to 12.7-10 in sec. IV.iv of Ch. 5.

<sup>481</sup> Contra e.g. Lim, *Sufferings*, 113 and Martin, *Corinthians*, 87-8.

the simultaneity of the treasure in jars of clay (v. 7a) appears to be invoked when Paul refers to his σῶμα (v. 10-11). This may partly explain why Paul employs a ἵνα clause with an additive καί in v. 10b and v. 11b, thus laying emphasis on life accompanying death.<sup>482</sup>

Whether or not one accepts the intricate sequence of life and death proposed above, the key direction of the passage relates to the climax in v. 12. This is confirmed by the ὥστε, signalling that this verse establishes the consequence of v. 7-11. The apostle concludes, 'Death is at work [ἐνεργεῖται] in us, but life in you' (v. 12). Paul is likely referring to the humble service that he provides to the community, the sense in which he works for '[their] sake' (e.g. 1.6-7, 4.15, 12.15). Interpreters rightly conclude that the apostolic ministry is a form of dying unto self, a decision to place the welfare of others before one's own desires.<sup>483</sup> Nonetheless, many are confused about the meaning of v. 12 given that the life-death pattern in Paul's experience appears to resolve and cease. For instance, Savage perceives discontinuity between v. 8-11 and v. 12, labelling Paul's conclusion an 'interesting departure' with little logical connection to the preceding verses.<sup>484</sup> One might suggest that the emphasis on dying for the Corinthians lends a great deal of support to Gorman's emphasis on the cross and his concept of cruciformity.<sup>485</sup> Gorman likewise points routinely to these verses, arguing that they represent Paul's 'chief apostolic *modus operandi*'.<sup>486</sup> He concludes that 'weakness' is the 'necessary corollary of the gospel' because 'that is precisely what happened [to Jesus] on the cross'.<sup>487</sup> One of the main

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<sup>482</sup> This emphasis is noted by Long, *Corinthians*, 86. He states that the 'naturally prominent purpose statement with ἵνα is given additive emphasis with καί' in v. 10b, 11b. Elsewhere in 4.8-12 the additive καί adds an 'emphatic punch'.

<sup>483</sup> See e.g. Savage, *Weakness*, 178; Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:337; Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 261.

<sup>484</sup> Savage, *Weakness*, 178. See also Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:337. Prevailing explanations include Pickett, *Cross*, 142 and Lim, *Sufferings*, 119, who suggest that Paul is explaining the nature of his apostolic ministry in v. 12, while Stegman, *Character*, 253-55 focuses on the imitation of Christ as an explanation for v. 12.

<sup>485</sup> This concept was introduced in sec. III of Ch. 1.

<sup>486</sup> Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 30.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.



difficulties with Gorman's argument, however, is that his understanding of *participation* with Jesus often appears conflated with the *imitation* of Jesus. The latter is certainly implied by Paul's participation in Christ's death, but it is not precisely the same. Gorman repeatedly makes easygoing connections between Paul's dying service to Corinth and Jesus's crucifixion without noting that the life and death of Christ first reside within Paul (v. 10-11). This paradox—a divine, alien reality—is given by God and cannot be conjured by the apostle on command (cf. 1.10). This is deeply important for Paul's argument because the Corinthians, who were implicated earlier in this passage, are in the midst of a debilitating despair that prevents them from embodying their usual selves, let alone the ethical ideals of Christ. Without the paradox *as divine gift*, there can be no paradox in Corinth.<sup>488</sup> Secondly, Gorman's understanding of cruciformity is largely about conformity to the cross of Christ, a *perfecting* of one's impulses to be more like those of Jesus on the cross. But this overlooks the starting point of this passage: Paul is struggling to avoid despair and strife (v. 9-10). His participation with Christ is less about perfection and more about a dramatic, emergency transformation of his knowledge and emotions that reverses his doomed path.

But the most significant reason for rejecting Gorman's reading is his inattention to the paradoxical pattern of life and death, especially the necessity of the resurrection. As shown above, Jesus' death and resurrection are given spiritual meaning by Paul as they reshape his knowledge and help him to understand that his weaknesses have newfound significance (v. 10-11). When this pattern of life and death breaks into his behaviour, resulting in his death, this represents a significant shift for the paradox as it moves into

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<sup>488</sup> See p. 129-32 above.

external realities and behaviours (cf. 1.8-11).<sup>489</sup> More importantly, this transferral of the paradox does not stop simply with Paul's death. Paul notes in v. 14 that he is looking forward to his future resurrection with Christ! This shows that v. 12 does not represent the end of the death-life pattern—as so many believe—rather, it has simply moved into a different sphere of Paul's life. The apostle is willing to die for the Corinthians because he knows that this will eventually be followed by his future resurrection (v. 14). This knowledge enables Paul to serve the irascible Corinthians because it reassures him that God will bring experiences of his power, first in the community (v. 12), and then in his own life (v. 14). In an even deeper sense then, the apostle's existential death (v. 10-11) paradoxically contributes to experiences of resurrection by giving Paul the requisite humility to engage in apostolic acts of service. So Paul is not being subjected to Christ's cross merely, but to his cross and resurrection.

It follows that interpreters have failed to understand the climax of v. 12 because they do not read this passage with attention to the paradoxical pattern of life and death. It works a transformation in Paul that moves into other spheres of his life. And what a transformation it is! In Asia, the apostle shuddered in the face of death (1.8). But here he embraces death (4.12). There is still a sombre note to this passage, given that it climaxes in death, but it remains a properly paradoxical conclusion. Paul's exemplary service towards the Corinthians serves as a reminder that, in order to truly find strength in weakness, one must experience the fragilities of existential death. But Paul has only gotten to this point through the cognitive and emotional transformation that is well-expressed in the image of the treasure in jars of clay. With a better understanding of God and himself, Paul no longer fails as God's agent of comfort (1.3-8). He was formerly inward-focused, stuck in his

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<sup>489</sup> This provides confirmation that Paul's suffering terminology has a high degree of semantic flexibility (as I contended earlier). See sec. IV.i of Ch. 2 for further discussion.

despair, and unable to serve. But the paradox has turned him *inside out*: he now chooses to vulnerably serve the Corinthians, to gain 'anxiety for all the churches' (11.28). In doing so, he models outward-focused vulnerability: a way of living and acting that is not impeded by weakness; rather, it is fuelled by weakness, which is paradoxically united to strength in Christ, so that one chooses to serve others even while being vulnerable.

One might object that Paul would not frame his behaviour in terms of a paradox, which seems confusing, especially when the treasure in jars of clay (v. 7a) is not immediately related to behaviour. However, Paul formulates ethical paradoxes in a variety of settings. The apostle refers to being a 'slave' to Christ and yet 'free' from sin (e.g. Gal. 5.13). He elsewhere views one's actions as a result of the battle between the 'flesh' and 'spirit' (i.e. Gal. 5.16-24). So it seems possible that the logic proposed in v. 12 is native to the apostle's thought. Even in antiquity generally, the Stoics were well-known for creating ethical paradoxes. These typically resulted from their belief that a good action lay in its intent rather than its external appearances. As Seneca says, 'So what counts is, not what is done or what is given, but the spirit of the action.'<sup>490</sup> This led the Stoics to frame even terrible events, such as one's own suicide, as an honourable act if it was well-intended.<sup>491</sup> Of course, the nature of Paul's paradoxes are somewhat different. But this evidence illustrates that ethical paradoxes certainly were not unattested in antiquity.

All of the above leads to the conclusion that Paul has formulated a paradox that shapes his behaviour towards the Corinthians. This is significant because, instead of simply defending his ministry, Paul is tracing a narrative of transformation that affects his emotions (4.8-9), knowledge (4.10), and behaviour (v. 12). He remains focused on his own

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<sup>490</sup> Seneca *Ben.* 1.6.1.

<sup>491</sup> This follows from the quotation above, but it is confirmed by John Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 233.

experiences, but he clearly implicates the Corinthians earlier in the passage.<sup>492</sup> Most importantly, he offers a paradigm for the Corinthians who, like Paul, are struggling with suffering and pain and could thus gain a great deal of direction from his explanation of the treasure in jars of clay. All of this pushes against the apologetic research paradigm because it shows that Paul is not simply defending himself, if he is doing so at all, and the heart of his message is a God-given paradox that transforms what appeared to be his deepest fear: he moves from being an apostle who shudders at death to one who embraces it.

*iii. The Engine of the Paradox: God's Intrusive Grace (v. 13-15)*

After supporting his preceding proclamation with the expressions of a psalmist—I believed, and so I spoke<sup>493</sup>—Paul says that he chooses to persist in trusting God amidst his sufferings because 'the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus' (v. 14). As concluded above, this demonstrates that the hope of the resurrection helps Paul to endure his present sufferings.<sup>494</sup> A more subtle significance of this proclamation, however, is its implication that the paradox is not an individual phenomenon: Paul says that he will be raised with Jesus and that God 'will bring us with you into his presence' (v. 14b). The inclusion of the Corinthians makes sense because, as seen earlier, the paradox of strength in weakness is intended to transform not only Paul's knowledge, emotions, and behaviours, but the Corinthians' too (1.8-11). Although Paul is more muted about the community in this passage, he foreshadows a more direct engagement with Corinth (i.e. 6.3-13; 12.1-21).

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<sup>492</sup> See p. 136-37 above.

<sup>493</sup> This quotation derives from LXX Psalm 115.1. Here Paul echoes the words of a psalmist who faced an unnamed affliction and received deliverance (Ps. 116.8). Notably, the Psalm contains an emphasis on the liberation brought by the Lord's deliverance: 'O Lord, I am your servant...You have broken my chains [διέρρηξας τοὺς δεσμούς μου]!' (v. 7). Although it is difficult to determine how much this line influenced Paul's argument, it is congruent with the larger theme of transformation: it frees the Corinthians' from their polarity of strength or weakness. For further discussion of this quotation, see Han, *Scripture*, 30-5.

<sup>494</sup> See p. 139-42 above.

But before one can explore the more universal portions of Paul's argument, one has to observe a crucial element of the strength in weakness paradox. In one of the most important verses of 4.7-15, Paul concludes, 'For it is all for your sake, so that as grace [χάρις] extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God [εἰς τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ]' (v. 15). The 'all' (πάντα) refers to the argument in chapter four, and presumably the preceding chapters.<sup>495</sup> In other words, the paradox appears to be delivered by an act of God's grace that is meant to extend to more and more people. Yet Martin suggests that Paul is referring to the grace generally made evident in his apostolic ministry: grace for salvation.<sup>496</sup> While most interpreters take this approach, there is a minority who believe that Paul's reference to grace is specific to the ministry that he has been cultivating amongst the Corinthians.<sup>497</sup> The latter position is preferable as Paul already considers the Corinthians to have received the grace of salvation—at least, they certainly had at some point (13.5).<sup>498</sup> So the grace of 4.15 is specific to Paul's presentation of the paradox in Corinth. It captures the intrusive nature of God's work, the sense in which God pursues and transforms the apostle and his community amidst the most desperate circumstances. This act of grace is 'not merely an act of God in the past; it is also and more characteristically, the act of God in the present.'<sup>499</sup> But how should one characterize it?

Until recently, interpreters of Paul typically understood grace as a 'free gift' given 'unconditionally'.<sup>500</sup> It was viewed generally as the same gift in every conceivable situation.

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<sup>495</sup> It is difficult to identify the immediate referent of πάντα, although this term likely refers to all of Paul's argument thus far given that the apostle has repeatedly stressed how the community benefits from his ministry (e.g. 1.8-11, 2.12-13). See e.g. Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 264-5 and Lim *Sufferings*, 122.

<sup>496</sup> Martin, *Corinthians*, 91. See also e.g. Harris, *Corinthians*, 356 and Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 213.

<sup>497</sup> See e.g. Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:344, Garland, *Corinthians*, 238; Barrett, *Corinthians*, 144-45.

<sup>498</sup> For more on the Corinthians' relationship to Paul's gospel, see sec. VI of Ch. 5.

<sup>499</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 202.

<sup>500</sup> See John M.G. Barclay, 'Pure Grace? Paul's Distinctive Jewish Theology of Gift', *Studia Theologica* 68, no. 1 (2014): 4-20.

However, Barclay has recently argued that 'grace is everywhere [in Second Temple Judaism], but this does not mean that grace is everywhere the same.'<sup>501</sup> This means that grace is, according to Barclay, 'perfected' by interpreters in six different ways. These are: superabundance (referring to the magnitude of the gift); singularity (denoting the giver's unmixed characteristics); priority (taking place prior to the recipient's initiative); incongruity (highlighting the giver's impartiality with respect to the worth of a recipient); efficacy (the gift's ability to achieve its intended end); and non-circularity (referring to a gift which transcends reciprocity).<sup>502</sup> With these categories in mind, one has a framework with which to determine the nature of grace in 2 Corinthians.<sup>503</sup>

In addition to 4.15, there are two occurrences within the 2 Corinthians material where Paul uses χάρις in connection with the strength in weakness paradox. The first is 6.1, where Paul has recently completed his discourse on divine ambassadorship (5.17-21). He then says, 'We appeal to you to not receive the grace of God [τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ] in vain!' (6.1). That Paul thinks it possible to receive this grace 'in vain [εἰς κενόν]' implies a particular meaning. There is some kind of effect which it is meant to bring (cf. 8.1-3). This is presumably the gift of reconciliation between the Corinthians and Paul through the radical transformation of the community via the strength in weakness paradox.<sup>504</sup> The Corinthians can reconcile because they have already been reconciled with God through Christ, who took on human weakness at the cross (cf. 13.4). He became 'sin' though he knew 'no sin' so that the Corinthians would receive his 'righteousness' (5.21). However

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<sup>501</sup> Barclay, *Gift*, 319.

<sup>502</sup> Barclay, *Gift*, 70-75.

<sup>503</sup> I recognize that Barclay's categories are largely used with reference to Galatians and Romans. As will be seen below, I propose a mixing of two categories in order to understand grace in 2 Corinthians. But this is not a rejection of Barclay's analysis; rather, it is a brief application of his approach to 2 Corinthians.

<sup>504</sup> This possibility is discussed in more detail in sec. V of Ch. 4.

reconciliation is enacted, grace is meant to produce tangible change, otherwise Paul would not note the possibility of receiving it in vain.

The second reference to grace appears in 12.9, where Paul, attempting to rid himself of the thorn in the flesh, hears the words: "'My grace [χάρις] is sufficient for you, for my power [δύναμις] is made perfect in weakness [ἀσθενεία]'". The disparity between God and Paul is evident here: the apostle is insufficient to respond to the thorn in the flesh while God is able to give a gift that suffices for the problem. With the gift given to Paul, it brings a dramatic change—he will 'boast [καυχήσομαι]' all the more gladly of his 'weaknesses [ἀσθενείαις]' (v. 9b). Paul is even 'content [εὐδοκῶ]' in 'persecutions [διωγμοῖς]' and 'calamities [στενοχωρίαις]' (v. 10).

The two-fold sense of grace found in 6.1 and 12.9-10 fits the work of grace in 4.15. God's grace allows Paul, being weak, to experience strength in weakness (v. 7a). But this experience of strength also drives him to serve others (v. 12). In this sense, the grace of the paradox is a combination of Barclay's 'incongruity' and 'efficacy' categories.<sup>505</sup> It is given 'without regard to the worth of the recipient' because it is given even to those who are not God—the weak, the lowly, those who cannot choose life (e.g. 1.8-9).<sup>506</sup> But at the same time, this grace transforms the weak and allows them to experience life in death—the Corinthians can pray for the individual who causes their weakness (1.10) and Paul can choose to serve others (4.12). It is grace which 'fully achieves what it was designed to do' by enacting a re-creation of humanity through the paradoxical creativity of God.<sup>507</sup>

So Paul's reference to this grace extending to 'more and more people' (v. 15) is best read as the Corinthians themselves. Divine grace constantly creates opportunities for

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<sup>505</sup> Barclay, *Gift*, 70-5.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>507</sup> *Ibid.*

growth and transformation, being fueled by the outward movement of Christ in the paradox (e.g. 13.4). This does not result merely in the imitation of Christ, nor does participation with Christ fully capture this change; instead, it is both of these realities as they are delivered by *the grace of Christ*. This grace can properly be called an 'intrusive grace' because it is doubly conspicuous on the human scene. Not only is it of God, and thus foreign to humanity, it pushes the recipient to behave in an alien manner—choosing to pray for those who harm you (1.11), to die to self (4.12, cf. 8.1-3), and to express thanksgiving (4.15). Crucially, intrusive grace is not requested (1.8-9). There is an element of surprise, an invasion of the divine into the human in a way that Paul and the Corinthians cannot expect. This is a result of the difference between God and humanity, but also the situations in which this grace is active. It comes in crisis, when all hope is lost. It is the eleventh hour rescue of God. When one experiences it, one can only say, 'On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again' (1.10). In this sense, it is not quite correct to say 'the glory of God is man fully alive'.<sup>508</sup> For Paul, the glory of God is the one who knows that they receive life *in their death*, and thus having this paradoxical cycle in view, chooses—like Christ—to pass life along to others, even if this is accomplished through their death.

#### *iv. Summary*

Upon representing his breakthrough with respect to the relationship between strength and weakness (i.e. 1.9-10) through the treasure in jars of clay (4.7a), Paul traces the transformative results of the paradox (v. 8ff). Although it might appear that he assigns power to God and weakness to humanity in v. 7b, Paul is simply giving credit to God for enacting the paradox of human strength in human weakness. By gaining access to strength

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<sup>508</sup> Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* IV.34.7.



in suffering (v. 7a), Paul is able to avoid feelings of despair and being forsaken (v. 8-9). Unlike the affliction in Asia, he is already aware of the death and life of Jesus being re-enacted within him (v. 10-11). The use of φανερόω suggests that Paul has a *cognitive realization* that he is most like Jesus—not when he is strong and competent—but when he is able to see his sufferings within a paradoxical pattern of death and life. In fact, the apostle's existential death contributes to experiences of resurrection life. This is clearest in v. 12, where Paul dies so that the Corinthians might have life. Although this appears to be the terminus of the paradox, Paul revives it in v. 14, thus revealing that the future hope of the resurrection enables his service. Not only does the paradox do this, but it also enables him to humbly serve the Corinthians by giving him the requisite experiences of humility to do so. While Paul has largely talked about himself in 4.7-15, he envisions the Corinthians joining him in the resurrection as co-recipients of God's intrusive grace (v. 15). This grace is not for salvation, but is particular to Paul's argument, suggesting elements of *incongruity* and *efficacy*. It is inaugurated by Christ's navigation of the difference between God and humanity and moves outward from God, bringing the paradox to both Paul and the Corinthians, and thus motivating Paul's decision to 'die' for the sake of the community.

## IX. Portraits of the Paradox from 2 Corinthians 5

Having completed an analysis of both 2 Cor. 1.3-11 and 4.7-15, I use this section to briefly interact with passages in 2 Corinthians 5 that clarify the nature of the strength in weakness paradox and Paul's aims more generally.

### *i. An Eschatological Resolution (v. 1-5)*

One of my key claims relating to the strength in weakness paradox concerns its comprehensive and enduring nature. I do not understand the paradox as a logical problem

to be solved and, by treating it seriously, I suggest that one gains a glimpse of its transformative utility for the emotions, knowledge, and behaviour (1.8-11; 4.8-9, 12). But this raises a question about the paradox's duration: when might the paradox cease, if at all? This is an especially important question given that Paul never appears to describe eschatological life as a place of weakness—quite the opposite (e.g. 1 Cor. 15.26; Rom 6.5-11). It appears that Paul likewise uses 2 Cor. 5.1-5 to reveal the paradox's terminus in the next life. The apostle says that believers occupy a 'tent [σκήνους]', but one day they will possess 'a building [οἰκοδομή] from God' which is 'eternal in the heavens' (v. 1). At that point 'what is mortal [θνητόν]' will be 'swallowed up [καταπόθη] by life' (v. 4).<sup>509</sup> Lindgard comments, 'The imagery thus oscillates between "receiving a heavenly, strong body at the parousia" and "being weak now"'.<sup>510</sup> In other words, the strength in weakness paradox resolves once eschatological life begins. This is confirmed by Paul's use of καταπίνω—a term elsewhere used to describe the consumption of food (e.g. Mt. 23.24; 1 Pt. 5.8)—which illustrates the extent to which mortality will be broken down and destroyed.<sup>511</sup>

But to understand the full significance of Paul's argument, one has to consider the connections forged by the language of 5.1-5 with the situation in Corinth. Paul portrays life in the earthly tent as one in which we 'groan [στενάζομεν]' because we are 'longing [ἐπιποθοῦντες] to put on our heavenly dwelling' (v. 2). Above all, this life is one where we are 'burdened [βαρούμενοι]' (v. 4). Each of these terms has emotional import, suggesting that Paul is acknowledging the pains of the Corinthians.<sup>512</sup> Of particular interest is Paul's use of στενάζω (v. 2, 4) given that this verb is often connected to λυπ- words in

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<sup>509</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Paul's view of the glorified body in 5.4, see Fredrik Lindgard, *Paul's Line of Thought in 2 Corinthians 4: 16-5:10*, WUNT 189 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 177-78.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid, 178-79.

<sup>511</sup> See also 'καταπίνω', *BDAG* (3rd ed.), 524.

<sup>512</sup> For the meaning of βαρέω and its connection to λυπ- words, see p. 96 above. Concerning ἐπιποθέω, see e.g. Rom 1.11 and 1 Th. 3.6 for its use in relational settings. It often refers to a 'strong desire' for something with 'the implication of need' ('ἐπιποθέω', *BDAG* [3rd ed.], 377).

antiquity.<sup>513</sup> For instance, Tobit 3.1-3 says, 'Then with much pain [λυπηθείς] and anguish of heart I wept, and with groaning [στεναγμῶν] began to pray....' In this sense, an intense feeling of sorrow can be accompanied by groaning. Philo even makes a causative connection: 'For we often grieve without groaning; but when we groan [ἐπιστένωμεν]...we let our pains bring on us a storm of trouble and distress [λύπαις]'.<sup>514</sup> So, as Paul describes the suffering of earthly life in 5.1-5, he appears to allude to the Corinthians' pains. Such weaknesses receive an initial dressing from the paradox, but the ultimate solution lies in the liberation of eschatological life.

*ii. Returning to the Source: Living for Him Who Died and Was Raised (v. 14-15)*

I noted earlier Kraftchick's remark that Paul forms a 'non-syllogistic' connection between Christ's death and resurrection and his own experiences.<sup>515</sup> This comment was made with respect to the affliction in Asia (1.8-11) and Paul's later comments about participating with Christ (13.4-5). One would, however, be justified in wondering why Paul describes such deeply Christological experiences with little description of the Christ event in chs. 1-4. So it is significant that, in 5.14-15, Paul says, 'For the love of Christ controls [συνέχει] us, because we have concluded this: that one has died [ἀπέθανεν] for all, therefore all have died [ἀπέθανον]. And he died [ἀπέθανεν] for all, that those who live [ζῶντες] might no longer live [ζῶσιν] for themselves but for him who died [ἀποθανόντι] and was raised again.' Here the Corinthian 'boasting' in 'outward appearance' (v. 12) is contrasted with Paul's other-focused, Christ-centered ethic. The apostle's logic contradicts the self-referential understanding of strength and weakness employed by the Corinthians. The pursuit of good appearance (5.12), worldly wisdom (2.17), and letters of

<sup>513</sup> For Paul's use of στενάζω, see e.g. Rom. 8.23 and 'στενάζω', *BDAG* (3rd ed.), p. 942.

<sup>514</sup> *Leg.* III. 211.

<sup>515</sup> See p. 102 above.

recommendation (3.1) do not align with Christ's cross and resurrection. The implication for the Corinthians is clear: they must, through Christ, put aside their pains—dictated by their hyper-competitive individualism—and be more prepared to serve others. As Schlatter says, 'The calling and the work of Jesus consist in the fact that he destroys our gods, and the weapon he uses to bring our false deities to nought is his cross'.<sup>516</sup> But how exactly is Christ destroying the Corinthians' 'gods'?

Pickett offers a theological description of these verses when he proposes that they communicate the *Christus exemplar*: 'The love which guides Paul in his relationship with the Corinthians finds paradigmatic expression in the death of Christ....The meaning of love which it symbolizes has been objectivated and determines not only Paul's understanding of love, but, more importantly, his activity as an apostle'.<sup>517</sup> He concludes that Jesus's death does not represent weakness merely but 'weakness for the sake of others'.<sup>518</sup> Despite the beauty of Pickett's reading, his interpretation falls short of Paul's point, which is to 'answer' those who 'boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart' (v. 12). In other words, Christ serves as more than a paradigm here. He represents a prior movement of grace that intrudes into the human sphere, changing the hearts of Paul and the Corinthians so that they would be better able to care for others (1.10-11; 4.15). Of equal significance is Pickett's emphasis on Christ's weakness to the exclusion of power. The whole thrust of Pickett's work is decidedly unparadoxical, making it difficult to envision how Jesus aids a community struggling to understand the relationship between strength and weakness. Paul says that, through Jesus's death, there are 'those who live' but, paradoxically, they live 'for him who died' (5.15). As I argued earlier, Paul champions a paradox of strength in weakness that stems from the Christ event, especially Jesus's

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<sup>516</sup> Adolf Schlatter, *Gesunde Lehre* (Velbert: Freizeiten-Verlag, 1929), 7-14.

<sup>517</sup> Pickett, *Cross*, 144-45.

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

incarnation, wherein he cuts across the difference between God and humanity to inaugurate the paradox. Paul's argument in 5.14-15 enriches this reading by providing evidence that the apostle associates the Christ event with an all-encompassing concern for others. To embody outward-focused vulnerability is to become more like Christ in his life, and especially in his death.

*iii. Ambassadors for Christ, Not the Apologetic Paradigm (v. 16-21)*

In 5.16-21, Paul establishes that Christ 'reconciled [καταλλάξαντος] us' to God and then gave to Paul the 'ministry of reconciliation [διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς]' (v. 18). As a result, Paul is now one of the 'ambassadors [πρεσβεύομεν] for Christ' to the Corinthians (v. 20).<sup>519</sup> So he concludes, 'Be reconciled [καταλλάγητε] to God' (v. 20). Scholars agree that Paul is asking the Corinthians to return to, rather than accept, the good news of the gospel.<sup>520</sup>

These verses are helpful because, earlier in my argument, I suggested that Paul views the Corinthians' potential rejection of his apostleship as tantamount to apostasy.<sup>521</sup> This viewpoint is confirmed with Paul's ambassador imagery, which signifies that Paul 'does not act on his own behalf, but Christ's'.<sup>522</sup> What is most significant about Paul's language of ambassadorship, however, is its implications for the purpose of 2 Corinthians. The key element of Paul's ambassador status is how God is making an appeal 'through [διὰ] Paul' (v. 20). The preposition implies the surprising reality that Paul views his desires for the Corinthians as representative of God's own intentions. While most interpreters

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<sup>519</sup> For more on the ambassador theme see David L. Turner, 'Paul and the Ministry of Reconciliation in 2 Cor. 5:11-6:2', *Criswell Theological Review* 4, no. 1 (1989): 77-95 and Jae Young Noh, 'An Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, and Its Contribution to Pauline Theology' (Ph.D., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1997).

<sup>520</sup> See e.g. Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 312; Barnett, *Corinthians*, 311; Stegman, *Corinthians*, 143.

<sup>521</sup> See sec. I of Ch. 1.

<sup>522</sup> Barrett, *Corinthians*, 178.

recognize that this is Paul's position in 5.16-21, they rarely, if at all, connect this to the prevailing research paradigm. This is demonstrated by constant references in the literature to the 'relationship' between Paul and Corinth and their ongoing 'conflict'.<sup>523</sup> Although these are certainly the earthly realities with which Paul is concerned, 5.16-21 appears to suggest that Paul's claims about the Corinthians, his ministry, and the strength in weakness paradox correspond to broader theological realities. It is possible that the influence of the present research paradigm has caused interpreters to overlook the significance of these verses. My exegesis of 2 Corinthians 1-5 has likewise shown that Paul is not merely interested in defending himself. He is concerned with the Corinthians' situation and how they are responding to their circumstances, especially their weaknesses. Paul only refers to himself because the community's acceptance of him is indicative of their relationship to the gospel, and to God.

Bultmann is very close to perceiving the purpose of 2 Corinthians when he says, 'Exegesis dare not allow itself to be misled into explaining the letter as an essentially biographical document...for Paul conceives his writing throughout as an apostolic writing....The letter thus has as its real object of understanding the apostolic office, or since it is primarily the office of proclamation, in the word of proclamation'.<sup>524</sup> Bultmann errs only in that he characterizes Paul's proclamation as an *exposition* of the apostolic ministry rather than a *pastorally-sensitive response* to the polarity of strength or weakness in Corinth. The message of 2 Corinthians is at once distanced from a response to any human situation—being a theological paradox—yet it still serves as a response to a particular historical circumstance. In light of Paul's argument in 5.16-21, and my exegesis of 2 Corinthians 1-5, I suggest that interpreters think less of a conflict between Paul and

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<sup>523</sup> E.g. Witherington, *Corinthians*, 327-38; Savage, *Weakness*, 2-3; Harris, *Corinthians*, 51-4.

<sup>524</sup> Bultmann, *Corinthians*, 334.

Corinth and more of a battle between the Corinthians and the Pauline gospel. Any apologetic elements in Paul's argument are fundamentally ambassadorial: they support Paul's renewed effort to proclaim his gospel to the Corinthians' polarity of strength or weakness. The paradox is not given to resolve a conflict between two human entities only; rather, it works to transform what humanity cannot. When Paul elucidates this paradox, he does not speak for himself but for the God who is seeking to change the attitudes, emotions, and actions of a community teetering on the edge of apostasy.

## X. Conclusion

My analysis of the strength in weakness paradox in 2 Corinthians 1-5 has revealed an argument which is strikingly personal because it is not only concerned with Paul's life but with the Corinthians' as well. Paul uses key terms and turns of phrase to address the Corinthian experience of pains (2.1-7). After perceiving the Corinthians' suffering in the prologue (1.3-7), thus suggesting that all of the material in 2 Corinthians concerns this issue, the apostle describes himself as 'beyond strength' and despairing 'of life itself' (1.8) in order to parallel the Corinthian polarity. The Corinthians' desperately need a transformation similar to Paul's during the affliction in Asia: an experience of the proto-paradox (a basic form of paradox which unites 'life' and 'death' in sequential fashion [v. 9b-10]). This experience stems from participation in Christ's death and resurrection (e.g. 13.4), the archetypal crossing of the pragmatic difference between God and humanity (e.g. 1.8-9, 3.5). God's work in actualizing the paradox is thus intrusive—it improves humanity's ability to respond to dire circumstances by enacting transformation. In 1.8-11, this includes a change in knowledge (i.e. learning to 'rely' on God in weakness [v. 9b]), the emotions (expressing hope rather than despair [v. 10]), and behaviour (praying for Paul rather than rebelling [v. 11]).

In 4.7-15, Paul explains the first formal paradox of 2 Corinthians: the treasure in jars of clay (v. 7a). The distinguishing factor between the proto-paradox and the formal paradox is *co-inherence* (i.e. the sense in which strength and weakness are 1) opposites that are simultaneously true, and 2) are mutually qualifying one another). Unfortunately, a significant amount of scholarship on 4.7a resolves the paradox by emphasizing one of strength or weakness, conflating them, merely contrasting them, or transforming them into one entity. Most importantly, the paradox cannot be viewed as the addition of *divine* strength to *human* weakness as this resolves the paradox by reducing it to the comparison of two entities within the same class. Like Paul, one must view the whole paradox as the gift of a transcendent God who overcomes the Corinthian polarity, resulting in radical transformation. This is evident in 4.7-12 where Paul bears the 'life of Jesus' and the 'death of Jesus' (v. 10-11) before proclaiming in v. 12 that he dies so that the Corinthians might live. Paul's emotions are transformed (v. 8-9) and he has a cognitive realization (v. 10-11) that he is like Jesus, not when he is strong, but when he understands that his failures give him the requisite humility to die unto self and render humble service to the Corinthians (v. 12). In this sense, the conclusion of both 4.7-15 and 1.8-11 is the same: the paradox achieves *outward-focused vulnerability*, which is a way of being in weakness that remains focused on serving others due to the aid of God's comfort (1.3-7) and grace (4.15).

In chapter five, the apostle notes how the paradox resolves in eschatological life (5.1-5) and the importance of Christ's death for formulating an outward-focused ethic (v. 14-15) before discussing his role as a divine ambassador to the Corinthians (v. 16-20). This ambassadorship demonstrates that Paul is concerned with the Corinthians' relationship to God and his gospel. Any sign that Paul defends himself is serving this broader purpose. So instead of referring to the conflict between Paul and the community, one must be aware



that the paradox is ultimately addressed to a conflict between the Pauline gospel and the community, which is centered upon the Corinthians' polarity of strength or weakness.

The result of my exegetical analysis of 2 Corinthians so far reveals a different background, theology, and—above all—a different purpose for the material than the prevailing research paradigm. Paul appears in these chapters, not as a self-focused apologist, but as a leader of the community who is invested in comforting the Corinthians' pains and showing them the difference that Jesus should make in their lives. In other words, he is less a rhetor, and more a pastor; less self-interested, and more outward-focused; less involved in presenting arguments to defeat his opponents, and more interested in tracing a personal narrative of transformation initiated by the strength in weakness paradox which, by the grace of God, the Corinthians may come to experience too. Nonetheless, there is still much of 2 Corinthians to be analyzed and questions that must be answered. What are Paul's criteria for identifying paradoxical strength and weakness as opposed to their polarizing versions? Does Paul's consolatory focus continue in chs. 6-7? Might there be a connection between the request that the Corinthians 'widen [their] hearts' (6.13) and their pains? And how is strength in weakness expressed in the letter's first expansive hardship catalogue (6.3-10)? These questions and others are considered in the following chapter, which traces the nature of the strength in weakness paradox in 2 Corinthians 6-7.

## Chapter 4

### A Heart-Piercing Event: The Paradox's Role in Reconciliation and Its First Fruits in Corinth

#### I. An Overview of 2 Corinthians 6.1-13

In light of Paul's detailed suffering narratives and his autobiographical style, the material in 2 Corinthians is often hailed as the apostle's most 'personal'.<sup>525</sup> But as I have already shown, there is the troubling irony that interpreters pore over the details of Paul's life and ministry without giving much thought to how his argument personally impacts the Corinthians, not least in their experience of pains (2.1-7; 7.5-16). This chapter is meant to further expose the difficulties of the apologetic paradigm by considering the transformative function of the strength in weakness paradox in 2 Corinthians 6-7, where Paul most directly engages the community's situation. This is a difficult task, however, as the varied material prevents an easy identification of Paul's argument. His concern lest the Corinthians receive God's grace 'in vain [εἰς κενόν]' (6.1) is followed by a discussion of commendation (v. 4) and the request that the Corinthians 'widen [πλατύνθητε]' their hearts (v. 13). After what many consider an interpolation (v. 14-19), Paul appears to resume his argument (7.1-4) before praising aspects of the Corinthians' response to the painful letter (7.5-16).<sup>526</sup> This dynamic sequence might explain why interpreters have not given much attention to pockets of these chapters.<sup>527</sup> But I have interest in them, especially 6.1-13,

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<sup>525</sup> See e.g. Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 19; D. A. Carson, *A Model of Christian Maturity: An Exposition of 2 Corinthians 10-13* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 9; Thrall, *Corinthians*, II: 960.

<sup>526</sup> For more on this problem, see e.g. Hans Dieter Betz, '2 Cor 6:14-7:1: An Anti-Pauline Fragment?', *JBL* 92, no. 1 (March 1973): 88-108 and William J. Webb, *Returning Home: New Covenant and Second Exodus as the Context for 2 Corinthians 6.14-7.1*, LNTS (London: Bloomsbury, 1993), 16-30. I do not discuss this passage because it possesses a much-debated relationship to the surrounding context and it does not contain material that is directly pertinent to my research focus.

<sup>527</sup> For comments to this effect, see e.g. Reimund Bieringer, 'Die Liebe des Paulus zur Gemeinde in Korinth : Eine Interpretation von 2 Korinther 6,11', *Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt* 23 (1998): 193-213 [193] and L. L. Belleville, 'Paul's Polemic and Theology of the Spirit in Second Corinthians', *CBQ* 58, no. 2 (1996): 281-304 [291].

because it includes a hardship catalogue (v. 4-10) which concludes with several apparent paradoxes (v. 8-10). These are followed by Paul's demand for reconciliation with the Corinthians (v. 11-13), thus raising questions about the connection between paradox, resistance to Paul, and the desired amends with Corinth. My analysis focuses on these issues, including how the catalogue contributes to the theology of the strength in weakness paradox.

Before undertaking my investigation, the elusive qualities of 2 Corinthians 6-7 offer the opportunity to return to an issue raised at the beginning of this thesis: Paul's oscillating tone.<sup>528</sup> This is a key point of debate regarding the integrity of 2 Corinthians and, upon a brief survey of existing theories, I concluded that they are not sufficiently robust. Unity theorists tend to overlook Paul's diverse tone while partitionists overextend their arguments by concluding—without the necessary external evidence—that a change in tone represents a different source. Both options are too simple, and thus reduce otherwise complex material into a set of generic letters or a single letter concerned with only one or two items. I suggested that my sketch of the situation in Corinth—where the community oscillates between strength and weakness—might offer a *via media* for the present impasse: Paul's tone changes wildly, which is not a sign of different letters, but a consistent strategy for engaging the multi-faceted experience of strength and weakness in Corinth.<sup>529</sup> If this is the case, one expects evidence throughout 2 Corinthians of a complex community and, in particular, some proof that Paul intentionally changes his tone to engage a polarized facet of the community's experience. The following section is an exploratory analysis focused on these issues, beginning with material in chs. 1-5 before proceeding to chs. 6-7.

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<sup>528</sup> See sec. IV.iii of Ch. 2.

<sup>529</sup> A variation in tone to suit the listener's situation was not uncommon in antiquity. See esp. Glad, *Adaptability*, 236-332. This tradition will be discussed in more detail in sec. II.ii of Ch. 5.

## II. A Prefatory Return to the Enigma: Paul's Changing Tone in 2 Corinthians

### *i. 2 Corinthians 1-5*

These chapters are generally perceived to have a warm, conciliatory tone.<sup>530</sup>

Partition theorists typically distinguish between 1.1-2.13 and 2.14-6.13, arguing that the beginning of 2 Corinthians is demarcated by its especially friendly nature.<sup>531</sup> This means that it is the beginning of a letter written near the resolution of the conflict between Paul and Corinth. The difficulty with this proposal is that Paul begins with the provocation that the 'God of all comfort' (1.3) allows one to die before finding life (1.8-9). This is paradoxically meant to encourage (v. 11), but the implication is that there are still problems in Corinth that demand attention. This is confirmed by Paul's recognition that the community is suffering (v. 4, 6).

Paul's tone becomes confrontational in v. 13 as he acknowledges the Corinthians' concerns about his sincerity and defiantly states, 'For we are not writing to you anything other than what you read [ἀναγινώσκετε] and understand [ἐπιγινώσκετε]' (v. 13). He even combats questions about his itinerary: 'Was I vacillating [ἐλαφρίᾳ] when I wanted to do this? Do I make plans according to the flesh, ready to say "Yes, yes" and "No, no" at the same time?' (v. 17). Minor describes Paul's response (v. 18-20) as one that 'crackles with controversy'.<sup>532</sup> Although it is true that Paul 'avoids making any charge' in 1.1-2.13, it is misleading to blandly characterize these verses as the beginning of a 'letter of joy'.<sup>533</sup>

Paul renews his conciliatory focus in 2.1-11 as he addresses the community's pains concerning his previous visit and letter. The apostle expresses his love for the community,

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<sup>530</sup> See sec. IV.iii of Ch. 2.

<sup>531</sup> See e.g. Welborn, 'Pain', 552-53 and Mitchell, *Corinthians*, 324.

<sup>532</sup> Minor, *Corinthians*, 35. See also Barnett, *Corinthians*, 101 and Calvin, *Corinthians*, II: 235.

<sup>533</sup> Schmithals, *Gnosticism*, 98.

tenderly reminding them of his concern (v. 1-4). But this fatherly discourse yields to firm exhortation: the Corinthians must cease punishment of the offender (v. 6). The significance of this issue is not that the Corinthians have failed to punish him, but that their punishment is bordering upon overbearing—the individual is at risk of being 'overwhelmed [καταποθῆ] by excessive sorrow [περισσοτεπρ λύπη]' (2.7). So Paul perceives a complex community: one which suffers (1.4,6), but is also capable of inflicting deep suffering on others (2.6-7).

The set of observations above shows, within even a small portion of 2 Corinthians, that Paul confronts the Corinthians (e.g. 1.11, 17), consoles them (e.g. 1.3-7, 2.1-4), and notes their ability for vigorous punishment (2.6). The tone and circumstance vary enough that one should, with a partitionists' logic, consider further partitions to explain this dynamic. However, an alternative explanation could emerge from those moments—what I will call 'identification verses'—where Paul identifies a particular issue in Corinth and correspondingly changes his tone. It is striking that Paul becomes sterner with the Corinthians once he has cited an aspect of their situation that is given to overbearing strength (e.g. 2.6), while his warmer tones are reserved for the Corinthians' suffering (e.g. 1.3-7). This suggests that Paul's tone changes may be the result of his decision to match the Corinthians' oscillations between strength and weakness.

A good example of this strategy occurs within the so-called 'great apology' (2.14-6.3, 7.2-4), where the apostle suddenly adopts a defensive tone and contends that he is a man 'of sincerity, commissioned by God' (2.17).<sup>534</sup> This shift is clearly related to claims against Paul's ministry: 'Are we beginning to commend [συνιστάνειν] ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of commendation [συστατικῶν ἐπιστολῶν]?' (3.1). Rather than positing a partition to explain Paul's defensive tone—and thus claiming the existence

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<sup>534</sup> See e.g. Bornkamm, 'Corinthians', 258-64; Betz, *Corinthians*, 3-6 and 'Corinthians', 1148-54. I review the main supporters of this proposal in sec. IV.iii of Ch. 2.

of a document that we do not possess—one can conclude that Paul grows more aggressive as he pivots toward the Corinthians' more rebellious, proud characteristics. It is possible that this side of Corinth exists alongside their weakness, given that Paul never indicates the full resolution of conflict during the 'reconciliatory' letter (cf. 1.4, 6, 17-19).

One might respond to my observations by arguing that the partition theories allow for small departures of tone within the fragments of 2 Corinthians. For instance, Schmithals recognizes that, even within the reconciliatory letter (1.1-2.13), Paul needs to remove 'the last misunderstandings' between himself and the community.<sup>535</sup> But such concessions are far from commonplace in partition literature.<sup>536</sup> Furthermore, the misunderstandings between Paul and Corinth are not marginal notes in their relationship: Paul disagrees with the congregation (e.g. 1.17, 2.6) and he admits that their ongoing conflict has pained him so deeply that he will not visit them (2.1-4). These sentiments are not captured by a 'letter of joy' label! As I argued previously, partition theories read the conflict too generically—from a small skirmish (i.e. 2.14-6.3, 7.2-4), to raging conflict (chs. 10-13), to reconciliation (1.1-2.13, 7.5-16).<sup>537</sup> This model can only accommodate general themes, and thus falls prey to a reductionist reading. The apostle oscillates his tone too *deeply* and too *often* to substantiate the partition theories.

My conclusion is confirmed in 2 Corinthians 5—within the so-called great apology (2.14-6.3, 7.2-4)—where Paul delivers the reassuring proclamation that God will eliminate the Corinthians' pains upon entering eschatological life (5.1-5). Paul's warmth fades, however, as he turns to perceptions about his ministry. The apostle suggests that the Corinthians are reasoning by the flesh (v. 16-17), resulting in his demand that they 'be

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<sup>535</sup> Schmithals, *Gnosticism*, 98. Also see Welborn, 'Pain', 552.

<sup>536</sup> Consider, for instance, the confidence of Bornkamm, 'Corinthians', 263 that his controversial theory is 'finally proved' within a very brief article.

<sup>537</sup> See sec. IV.iii of Ch. 2.

reconciled [καταλλάγητε] to God' (v. 20). This represents the 'discord'<sup>538</sup> and 'degree of doubt'<sup>539</sup> that pervades the Paul-Corinth relationship. Considering this dimension of Paul's argument in light of the chapter's beginning, it appears that the apostle both comforts the Corinthians with the hope of eternity and questions the extent to which they are committed to this hope *within the same chapter* of a supposedly *single-minded* letter. Even unity theorists encounter difficulty here, with many opting to view the distinct concerns of 2.14-6.13, 7.2-4 as a 'digression' rather than showing a willingness to consider how they might fit Paul's address to a deeply conflicted congregation.<sup>540</sup>

At this point, a clear pattern is emerging: the Corinthian situation appears more dynamically two-sided than the gradual development of the conflict posited by partition theorists. Furthermore, Paul clusters his changes of tone around statements that identify a particular facet of the community (e.g. 3.1; 1.13). This suggests that the changes in Paul's approach are not the result of different documents, but a coherent strategy meant to connect with the Corinthians' unstable embodiment of weakness or strength. This raises the question of whether there is any evidence of these trends in 2 Corinthians 6-7.

## *ii. 2 Corinthians 6-7*

These chapters begin with Paul continuing his confrontational tone: he warns the Corinthians 'not to receive the grace of God in vain' (v. 1). In v. 3, he begins a hardship catalogue which is a form of 'commendation' (v. 4). The catalogue culminates in the apostle's passionate request for the Corinthians to reciprocate his care for them (v. 13). There is a significant change in 7.4, however, as the apostle reverses course and announces

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<sup>538</sup> Garland, *Corinthians*, 299.

<sup>539</sup> Barnett, *Corinthians*, 309.

<sup>540</sup> See e.g. Hughes, *Corinthians*, 17 and Harris, *Corinthians*, 14. While neither Hughes nor Harris holds to a total unity (they both believe chs. 10-13 represent a separate letter), their argument is still revealing for how they try to maintain the unity of chs. 1-9.

that he has 'great pride [πολλή καύχησης]' in the community. This precedes 7.5-16, which is often considered a part of the reconciliatory letter that began in 1.1-2.13. It contains various statements of reassurance: the 'God who comforts the downcast' (7.6), Paul's 'rejoicing' over the Corinthians (7.7), and praise for the community's 'earnestness' (7.11).

The difference between 2.13-6.13, 7.2-4 and 7.5-16 is often explained by a partition at 7.5ff, the beginning of a fragment belonging to the letter of reconciliation (1.1-2.13). But one wonders why the partition does not include 7.4?<sup>541</sup> As the common theory stands, the apology (2.14-6.13; 7.2-4) concludes with the Corinthians being consoled that Paul has great 'pride [καύχησης]' in them (v. 4). Commenting on this verse, Harris calls Paul's comfort 'complete'<sup>542</sup> and Collins views it as indicative of Paul's 'heartfelt relationship with the Corinthians'.<sup>543</sup> But Thrall rightly observes that the contrast in tone between 7.2-4 and 7.5ff is 'exaggerated'.<sup>544</sup> In fact, the whole paragraph of 7.2-4 appears misunderstood—it contains an intermingling of the tones seen previously in the material. It begins with firm exhortation (v. 2) before providing assurance that Paul does not 'condemn' the Corinthians as they are 'in our hearts' (v. 3). By the end of the paragraph, Paul recognizes that his relationship with the Corinthians is an 'affliction' yet he possesses 'joy' (v. 4). In this sense, v. 2-4 acts as a *transition* between the more apologetic discourse that precedes it and the conciliatory emphasis of 7.5-16. By combining these impulses, Paul does not reveal a clean break indicative of separate letters but an altogether complex situation in which the apostle must move between confrontation and consolation to suit the Corinthian situation. This is reinforced by the focus upon the community's repentance in 7.5-16, which suggests that the

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<sup>541</sup> To be fair, some partitionists focus upon the change of subject at 7.5 as this verse appears to resume Paul's travel narrative from 2.13 (see e.g. Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:487-88 and Welborn, 'Pain', 552-54). This, however, does not absolve them from considering how the apostle's tone functions in 7.2-4.

<sup>542</sup> Harris, *Corinthians*, 520.

<sup>543</sup> Collins, *Corinthians*, 151.

<sup>544</sup> Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:23.



emergence of a distinct consolatory tone in v. 5ff is the result of Paul's recognition that the community deserves some encouragement for the way that they received Titus (v. 6, 13).

### *iii. Conclusion*

Therefore, this very brief analysis of 2 Corinthians 1-7 suggests that there is a deeper logic for Paul's tone than the solutions offered by existing theories. The partition hypotheses especially misunderstand the material by repeatedly taking the nuances of Paul's tone to be evidence of separate, unnuanced documents. Instead, one can view this diverse material as a unity by recognizing the complexity of the Corinthian situation: they embody the strong and the weak. Paul uses his 'identification verses'—places where he identifies a polarity of the Corinthians—to implicitly acknowledge why he is changing his tone (e.g. 3.1, 7.8-9). Although the apostle favours the consolation of the community's weaknesses in these chapters (e.g. 1.3-7; 2.1-7), he still focuses on their proud pursuit of strength from time to time (e.g. 5.16-6.1). Crucially, Paul's oscillation in tone is simply too frequent to support partition hypotheses. Even *within* the proposed partitions of 2 Corinthians, Paul oscillates between confrontation and consolation far more than one would expect given the broad characterizations created by partitionists for these sections.

All of the above suggests that Paul plays the role of a wise pastor counselling a bipolar community in 2 Corinthians 1-7. The existing paradigm is correct in its emphasis on Paul's sometimes harsh tone, but it downplays the apostle's often comforting voice and, in doing this, fails to see that Paul's striking adjustments in tone are a part of a larger strategy to sensitively attend to the extremes of the Corinthians' polarity. In response to the community's gloom, Paul responds with comfort. In the areas that they stray from this persona, filling up with rage against Paul himself, the apostle adjusts and confronts these challenges directly. But alongside this strategy, Paul's hardship catalogue in 6.3-10—

especially its paradoxes (v. 8-10)—recalls that the apostle is doing more than changing his tone to match the situation. As he addresses the Corinthians from different angles, he is also articulating an experience that is not truly evident in the community: the strength in weakness paradox. This does not merely *respond* to polarities but *overcomes* them. In the following sections, I consider how this is so by describing the paradox's function and its place in the argument of 6.1-13.

### III. Discerning Paul's Strategy for Reconciliation with Corinth

#### *i. The Context and Basis of Paul's Plea for Reconciliation with God (v. 1-4a)*

The paragraph which begins with Paul's request that the community not receive 'God's grace in vain' (v. 1) is a part of a broader argument that commences in 5.11. Paul is trying 'to persuade others', but he is not 'commending' himself to Corinth (v. 11-12). He no longer lives for himself, but for him who died and was raised again (v. 15). This means that Paul does not regard anyone 'from a human point of view' (v. 16) and, having received the 'ministry of reconciliation' (v. 18), he serves as one of the 'ambassadors for Christ' (v. 20). As discussed previously, this means that Paul envisions two layers in his relationship with the Corinthians: the human dimension (i.e. the pain that Paul caused them [2.1-7], their rejection of his leadership [10.10]) and the theological dimension in which, by their rejection of Paul, the community rejects God himself (5.20).<sup>545</sup> In 6.1, it is evident that Paul focuses on the latter dimension given his reference to 'the grace of God'. He requests that the Corinthians reconcile with God and, in doing so, they will reconcile with him too.

The more interesting issue is *how* Paul tries to enable the community's reconciliation with God. The existing answers are influenced by the apologetic paradigm, which causes many interpreters to view Paul's appeal to divine authority as an almost

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<sup>545</sup> See sec. IX.iii of Ch. 3.

tyrannical tactic.<sup>546</sup> According to Stegman, it is the sheer force of argument in Paul's self-identification as Christ's ambassador that can win the community back.<sup>547</sup> But one must consider the unique logic of 5.21: because Christ has achieved reconciliation with God, there are no barriers for the Corinthians' return to God. The implication is that the Corinthians can also reconcile with Paul because the achieved vertical reconciliation allows for continued horizontal reconciliation.<sup>548</sup> Guthrie likewise refers to 6.1-4b as the 'applied conclusion' of 'Paul's theological reflections on reconciliation begun at 5:18'.<sup>549</sup> This suggests that neither layer of a reconciliatory act is independent—a resolution between Paul and Corinth is given a far greater chance of success in light of the God who achieved reconciliation with humanity.<sup>550</sup>

It appears, however, that the basis of appeal outlined above requires refinement. If one reads 6.1-4b in light of 5.11-21, the form of v. 21 must be taken seriously. Paul refers to the Christ event, which is elsewhere the source of the strength in weakness paradox (e.g. 13.4). Here he outlines a cruciform transaction that occurs as the one who 'knew no sin [μὴ γνόντα ἁμαρτίαν]' was 'made [ἐποίησεν]' to be sin for 'our sake [ὕπὲρ ἡμῶν]' (v. 21).<sup>551</sup> The emphasis rests on humanity's inability to cleanse itself, whereas God in Christ can do so. This is underlined by Christ's sacrifice in v. 21: 'he became sin who knew no sin' with the

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<sup>546</sup> See esp. Graham Shaw, *The Cost of Authority: Manipulation and Freedom in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 123-25. To a lesser extent, Linda L. Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 163-64; Barrett, *Corinthians*, 184-85; Best, *Corinthians*, 60-61.

<sup>547</sup> Stegman, *Corinthians*, 148. Also see Schmeller, *Korinther*, I: 341 and Collins, *Corinthians*, 127. Calvin, *Corinthians*, II: 244 summarizes: 'Ministers connect their endeavours with God's commission; as it is the part of an ambassador to enforce by arguments, what he brings forward in the name of his prince'.

<sup>548</sup> So Belleville, *Corinthians*, 161 and Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 269.

<sup>549</sup> Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 315.

<sup>550</sup> See e.g. David L. Turner, 'Paul and the Ministry of Reconciliation in 2 Cor. 5:11-6:2', *Criswell Theological Review* 4, no. 1 (1989): 85 and Victor Paul Furnish, 'Ministry of Reconciliation,' *Currents in Theology and Mission* 4, no. 4 (August 1977): 211.

<sup>551</sup> For more discussion of 2 Cor. 5.21, see e.g. M.D. Hooker, 'Interchange in Atonement', *BJRL* 60 (1977-78): 462-81 and N.T. Wright, 'On Becoming the Righteousness of God: 2 Corinthians 5:21', in *Pauline Theology*, ed. David M. Hay, Vol. 2: 1 & 2 Corinthians (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 200-208.

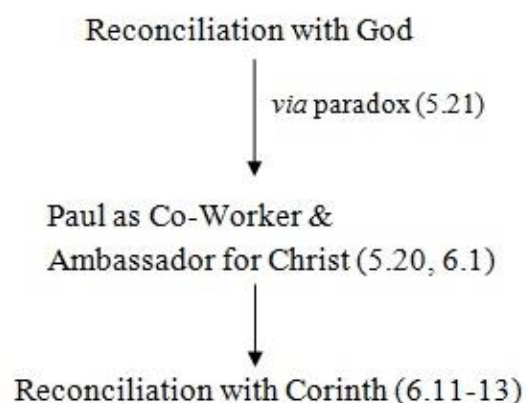
result that humanity receives 'the righteousness of God'. The verse's structure 'accentuate[s] the double transformation' of sin removal and the receiving of God's righteousness.<sup>552</sup>

The nature of the transaction described in v. 21 is striking because of what it claims to accomplish: Paul emphasizes that Christ 'knew no sin' and yet was 'made to be sin'. God not only authors and completes the action, he does something that seems entirely improbable. Although there is more that could be said concerning v. 21, the above highlights how well this verse fits the mould of the proto-paradox.<sup>553</sup> The movement of sin to the sinless Christ represents the surprising

collision of two opposed realities. So Bultmann is right in saying, 'This is...the paradox, that the sinless one as such was made a sinner'.<sup>554</sup> This results in a modified basis for reconciliation in 6.1-4b that is illustrated on the right. Paul reasons from his reconciliation with

God (v. 18), including his ambassadorship (v. 20), that divine reconciliation is possible in Corinth (6.1). But as he moves from his ambassadorship to the Corinthians, he does so *by means of a paradox*—specifically, the Christological paradox that reconciles God and humanity (v. 21). If Paul uses a paradox to underline the possibility of reconciliation with God, it follows that a similar paradox may form the basis of Paul's plea that the community reconcile directly with him (6.11-13).<sup>555</sup>

Figure 4



<sup>552</sup> Long, *Corinthians*, 112.

<sup>553</sup> For the definition of a proto-paradox, see sec. III.ii of Ch. 3.

<sup>554</sup> Bultmann, *Corinthians*, 165.

<sup>555</sup> See p. 183ff below.

*ii. Identifying the Nature and Redemptive Context of God's Grace*

Having established some clarity on the context of 6.1-4a, these verses become more certain in their meaning. Paul begins by referring to co-working in v. 1a (i.e. συνεργέω). Given that he has just mentioned God's achievement of reconciliation with humanity (5.21), it seems that God is the envisioned supporter of Paul's effort to enact reconciliation in Corinth (cf. 1 Cor. 15.10).<sup>556</sup> Their plea is for the community not to receive the 'grace [χάρις] of God in vain [εἰς κενόν]' (v. 1b). But what is the precise nature of this grace?

Given the apostle's twofold use of σωτηρία in the following verse—where he quotes Isaiah 49.8 and refers to the 'day of salvation'—interpreters reason that if the Corinthians were to fully reject Paul, they would reject their salvation.<sup>557</sup> This means that to vainly receive grace (v. 1) is to reject salvific grace. Of course, Paul views the Corinthians as believers,<sup>558</sup> so it is argued that salvation is only at issue in the sense that the ongoing conflict places the community's salvation in jeopardy. The apostle 'questions their salvation'<sup>559</sup> because they 'fail to conform' to Christ while they consider 'another Gospel'.<sup>560</sup>

But the above interpretation for v. 1-2 creates tension by having Paul refer to salvific grace despite the Corinthians already being in possession of this grace. Such readings also fail to consider the extent to which Paul pins his argument on the Corinthians' identification with Christ—they could not expect to experience the paradox without it (e.g. 1.3-7; 13.4). So while Paul may be questioning the community's sincerity, he is certainly not accusing them of apostasy. In fact, prior to v. 1-4b, the apostle reflects *specifically* on

<sup>556</sup> Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:451. Also see e.g. Collins, *Corinthians*, 127 and Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 315.

<sup>557</sup> This is the consensus interpretation. See e.g. Schmeller, *Korinther*, I:346-48; Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 316; Barrett, *Corinthians*, 183.

<sup>558</sup> See sec. VI of Ch. 5.

<sup>559</sup> Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 271.

<sup>560</sup> Barrett, *Corinthians*, 183.

the Christological paradox that leads to the Corinthians' entry into the people of God.<sup>561</sup> This suggests that Paul questions the Corinthians' 'salvation' because they have not yet embodied Christ's paradoxical achievement on the cross (5.21). The Corinthians risk a rejection of an *essential fruit* of their salvation: the pursuit of reconciliation with others, through the toughest circumstances, much like God's achievement of reconciliation with them.

Consequently, Paul's reference to grace bears resemblance to the intrusive grace discussed previously.<sup>562</sup> It is associated with the paradoxical workings of God (5.21) and it functions in the most dire relational crises (6.1). This kind of grace also carries a sense of immediacy, as Paul says, 'Behold, *now* [νῦν] is the favourable time, *now* [νῦν] is the day of salvation' (v. 3b) (*italics mine*). The apostle is interested in a present change in the lives of the Corinthians, what Stegman calls a 'deeper conversion'.<sup>563</sup> This change is so great that it can be described as a form of σωτηρία. So, in 6.1, Paul appears to chastise the Corinthians for overlooking the *incongruous* and *effective* gift that God gives to achieve, among other things, the possibility of reconciliation. But *from what* are the Corinthians to be saved? The coincidence of several variables found in previous passages—Paul's appeal to a paradox, the occurrence of intrusive grace, a developing interest in the Corinthians—offers this suggestion: the Corinthians are to be delivered from their experience of pains. Here Paul foreshadows what will soon become more explicit. The σωτηρία of v. 2 likely refers to a deliverance from paralyzing affliction rather than a redemption from sin (e.g. the use of the same term in 2 Cor. 1.6; 7.10).<sup>564</sup> As I will demonstrate in v. 11-13, the apostle identifies

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<sup>561</sup> See p. 166-68.

<sup>562</sup> See sec. VIII.iii of Ch. 3..

<sup>563</sup> Stegman, *Corinthians*, 148.

<sup>564</sup> Several commentaries on Isaiah 49.8 support my interpretation of Paul's reference to 'salvation' being a *renewal* or *deliverance* rather than an *initial entry* into the people of God. See e.g. John D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66* WBC (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 188-90 and Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* (London: SCM

the community's pains as a barrier that needs to be removed in order for the two parties to secure a relational amends.<sup>565</sup> Although Paul will remain indirect in his identification, as he certainly is in v. 1-2, this suits his strategy in which he avoids fixating on the community's weaknesses in order to better pursue reconciliation.<sup>566</sup>

An objection to my suggestion that Paul signals interest in the Corinthians' pains might be his self-referential manner in v. 3ff. His desire that 'no fault [μὴ μωμηθῇ]' be found in his 'ministry [διακονία]' (v. 3) requires him to 'commend [συνιστάντες]' himself to the community (v. 4a). Likewise, interpreters take v. 3-10 to concern the "'apostolic ideal'"<sup>567</sup> of suffering, the "'credentialing'" of Paul's ministry.<sup>568</sup> But to be clear, I am not contending that Paul deals with the Corinthians' pains in v. 1-2ff, only that he foreshadows a more direct engagement with this issue in v. 11-13. So Paul admittedly becomes apologetic in v. 3-10, yet one still has to clarify the *subject* of his defense. Unfortunately, the standard treatments above are too individualistic, thus failing to note that Paul—as Christ's ambassador—will use the hardship catalogue to model what it looks like to receive the grace of God (v. 3-10).<sup>569</sup> The hardship catalogue is not simply about Paul, but about a process of transformation that culminates with strength in weakness: 'dying, and see—we are alive' (v. 9) and being 'sorrowful, yet always rejoicing' (v. 10).<sup>570</sup> Paul has not appealed to his divine authority (5.18-6.1) simply for rhetorical effect, but because he is dependent

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Press, 1969), 212-16. For further insight into the wide semantic range of σωτηρία, see e.g. Phil. 1.19, 2 Cor. 1.6 and 'σωτηρία', BDAG (3rd ed.), 985.

<sup>565</sup> See p. 183ff.

<sup>566</sup> See sec. III.iv of Ch. 2.

<sup>567</sup> Güttgemanns, *Apostel*, 302.

<sup>568</sup> Harris, *Corinthians*, 469. Also see Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 288.

<sup>569</sup> Harris, *Corinthians*, 458 suggests that grace (6.1) relates to the opportunity to reconcile, thus enveloping the material of v. 3-10, incl. v. 11-13, in a counter-narrative that embodies the reception of grace. See also Jan Lambrecht, 'The Favorable Time: A Study of 2 Corinthians 6,2a in Its Context', in *Studies on 2 Corinthians*, ed. Reimund Bieringer and Jan Lambrecht, BETL, CXII (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1994), 515–29 [520-21].

<sup>570</sup> For a discussion of these suffering terms and their relationship to Paul's strength and weakness categories, see sec. IV.i of Ch. 2.

upon the grace of God to function amidst his 'beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights' (v. 5). Moreover, he is preparing to address an emotive problem in Corinth that requires divine intervention. This is why Fitzgerald is perceptive to say, in distinction to most interpreters, that the catalogue functions as an 'exhortation' which pushes the Corinthians to adopt the behaviours and attitudes portrayed within.<sup>571</sup> Whether or not Fitzgerald is correct, one cannot adopt the consensus view of the catalogue when its content—which concerns weakness—is inherently relevant to the Corinthians' pains.

### *iii. Summary*

Paul begins 6.1-13 by announcing that he is 'working together' with God to bring about divine reconciliation in Corinth (v. 1). Crucially, Paul points to Christ's paradoxical death (5.21) as the means through which this reconciliation can occur. This suggests that when Paul demands reconciliation between himself and Corinth (6.11-13), he is likely to follow a similar rationale. But for the time being, he describes the community's rebellion which places them at risk of receiving God's grace in vain (v. 1b). This grace is radically effective (likened to a 'day of salvation' [v.2]) and occurs in the present, thus suggesting it is the intrusive grace of God that has previously signalled the possibility of communal transformation, as opposed to a salvific grace that is already possessed by the Corinthians. As Christ's ambassador (5.20), it follows that Paul's hardship catalogue is not merely a defensive tactic but a model for what it means to truly receive God's grace. It only remains to be seen what this grace is for, and where Paul's paradoxical logic (5.21) will re-surface.

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<sup>571</sup>Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 187. It is significant, however, that Fitzgerald connects Paul's exhortation to a concern for the 'esteem' with which the community holds the apostle (p. 186).



## IV. The Hardship Catalogue's Theological Function

### *i. The Catalogue's Structure: An Overlooked Crescendo (v. 4b-10)*

In response to the abrupt transition between Paul's calls for reconciliation (v. 1-2) and the hardship catalogue (v. 4b-10), some interpreters dismiss the latter as a digression or insertion.<sup>572</sup> However, by highlighting Paul's pastoral interests (v. 1-4), I have provided some grounds for considering how this catalogue fits within Paul's larger argument. This is especially so in light of Fitzgerald's comment that Paul's catalogues tend to build upon one another.<sup>573</sup> The first catalogue of the letter (i.e. 4.8-9) allows Paul to distinguish between the Corinthians' polarized experience of weakness and one that is paradoxically related to strength.<sup>574</sup> So how might Paul be using the catalogue in 6.4b-10 to help the Corinthians?

An entry point for re-thinking the catalogue's function is its internal structure. The first half, v. 4b-7, contains a list of hardships (v. 4b-5) followed by a list of virtues (v. 6-7). These lists are viewed either as an undifferentiated set of characteristics or, more commonly, the hardship list is delineated into three triads: general hardships (v. 4b), specific hardships illustrating the first three (v. 5a), and occupational hazards (v. 5b).<sup>575</sup> The triads are typically said to emphasize Paul's 'spiritual quality' and support his 'apostolic credential'.<sup>576</sup> This leads to readings that diverge from the context, including the almost hagiographic reading of Hughes: 'This movingly beautiful hymn-like passage...flows from the deep heart of the Apostle's knowledge and experience. Its almost lyrical intensity, its

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<sup>572</sup> See e.g. J. F. Collange, *Enigmes de la Deuxième Epître de Paul aux Corinthiens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 291; Chris U. Manus, 'Apostolic Suffering (2 Cor 6:4-10): The Sign of Christian Existence and Identity', *The Asia Journal of Theology* 1, no. 1 (April 1987): 41-42; Stegman, *Corinthians*, 161.

<sup>573</sup> Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 192.

<sup>574</sup> See sec. VIII.ii of Ch. 3.

<sup>575</sup> See e.g. Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 192-93; Manus, 'Suffering', 43; Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 278.

<sup>576</sup> Manus, 'Suffering', 43. For more on what each vice and virtue might refer to, particularly in v. 4b-7, see e.g. Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 192-201; Harris, *Corinthians*, 464-486; Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:454-468. An especially helpful analysis is provided in Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 287-98.

structural balance, and its genuine spontaneity have called forth admiration and gratitude in all generations'.<sup>577</sup> But such praise for the apostle's life and poetry would have been contested by the Corinthians! One must recall that the focus of v. 1-13 is reconciliation in Corinth amidst deep conflict, thus rendering Paul's self-glorification an unlikely strategy.<sup>578</sup>

Another reading of the catalogue that resonates with Paul's interest in reconciliation can be discerned by focusing upon the broader flow of v. 4b-10. Interpreters are correct in treating the first three vices (v. 4b-5) as broad in scope. For instance, Paul refers to *θλιψις*—a term that elsewhere summarizes the ongoing saga in Corinth (e.g. 1.3-11; 7.4).<sup>579</sup> The hardship list then attains a level of specificity (e.g. 'riots' and 'sleepless nights' in v. 5) that remains through the beginning of the virtue list (e.g. 'patience' and 'genuine love' in v. 6). But Paul begins to ascend to more general terms in v. 7, culminating in the 'weapons [*ὄπλα*] of righteousness [*δικαιοσύνη*] for the right hand and for the left' and 'the power [*δύναμις*] of God'. The latter phrase confirms that Paul's suffering terminology in v. 4b-10 can be understood with respect to the strength in weakness paradox.<sup>580</sup> Although Paul's experiences are not yet paradoxical, the symmetry of these two lists—nine hardships and nine virtues—suggest that the catalogue was developed with the paradox in mind. There is a strength for every weakness, a balance that prevents either from overcoming the other.

Beginning in v. 8, Paul notes the extremes of his experience: 'honour [*δόξα*] and dishonour [*ἀτιμία*]' and 'slander [*δυσφημία*] and praise [*εὐφημία*]'.<sup>581</sup> This represents a

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<sup>577</sup> Hughes, *Corinthians*, 238.

<sup>578</sup> The main motivation for the virtue list is seen by many to be the demonstration of Paul's endurance in suffering: see e.g. Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 191; Schmeller, *Korinther*, I:352-53; Manus, 'Suffering', 45. This does not, however, capture the wide scope of the catalogue's climax that I detail below.

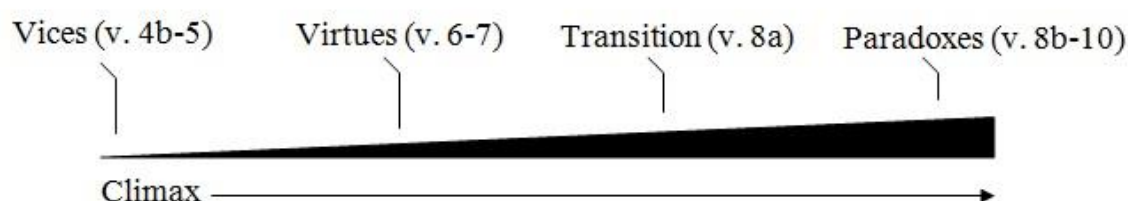
<sup>579</sup> See sec. II.ii of Ch. 3.

<sup>580</sup> Paul makes a similar reference in 1.8, demonstrating that the affliction in Asia can be understood in terms of strength and weakness. The primary rationale for reading the catalogue in this manner is the closely related nature of Paul's suffering terms. See sec. IV.i of Ch. 2 for discussion.

<sup>581</sup> See e.g. Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 291-93 and Harris, *Corinthians*, 478-80 for further discussion on the meaning of these contrasts.

transition from the presentation of singular vices and virtues to unique pairings. Paul then settles into a *ὥς...καί/δέ* formula through v. 8b-10 that describes himself 'as [*ὥς*] dying [*ἀποθνῆσκοντες*], and behold [*καὶ ἰδοὺ*], we live [*ζῶμεν*],' 'as [*ὥς*] poor [*πτωχοί*], yet [*δέ*] making many rich [*πλουτίζοντες*],' and 'as [*ὥς*] having nothing [*μηδέν*], yet [*καί*] possessing everything [*πάντα*].' These verses represent a total reversal of the pattern that began in v. 4b. The apostle started by listing vices and virtues in a manner that the Corinthians understand: non-paradoxical strength and weakness. But he now reveals how he experiences life in Christ, wherein his opposite experiences are brought together into unique pairings.<sup>582</sup> In this sense, the catalogue contains a trajectory, a climax of what appear to be paradoxical statements.<sup>583</sup> The proposed structure of the catalogue is illustrated below.

Figure 5



*ii. The Nature of the Paradoxes: Revelatory or Transformative? (v. 8b-10)*

I have so far assumed that the formulations in v. 8b-10 are paradoxes, thus necessitating further discussion about *why* they are paradoxes and *how* they function. The list-like structure of the catalogue inhibits developments previously observed in paradoxical passages: a specific event(s) in Paul's life is not easily discerned (cf. 1.8-11)

<sup>582</sup> Paul's conclusion that he is an ambassador for Christ (5.20) suggests that his experience in 6.8b-10 is especially indicative of life in Christ. See also 4.7-12, where Paul's experience of life and death (cf. 6.9) is driven by his faith in Christ. Notably, Hanson, *Paradox*, 68-78 makes a strong case that v. 8-10 contains echoes from the sayings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (e.g. Mt 5.3,4).

<sup>583</sup> I discuss why v. 8b-10 contains 'paradoxes' in the following sub-section.

nor is there a clear theological sequence that produces the paradoxes (cf. 4.10-11). But the catalogue allows Paul to develop a sense of symmetry mentioned above—nine items in the virtue and hardship lists respectively—which climax with the formulations of v. 8b-10. The entities comprising these paradoxes are normally mere opposites (e.g. death-life [v. 9], rich-poor [v. 10]), but Paul insists upon the surprising reality that they exist within seemingly inseparable pairings. So the emphasis rests on the *co-existence* of these opposed realities within Paul's life, although each paradox retains its own distinctiveness. For instance, the ὥς...καί/δέ formula generally implies that the contradictory realities occur simultaneously, which makes sense of paradoxes such as imposing and being true (v. 8) or unknown and well-known (v. 9a).<sup>584</sup> But the paradox of dying and living (v. 9b) is a sequence given the ἰδοὺ—which expresses a sudden appearance—and the way this paradox is employed in other passages (cf. 1.8-11; 4.8-12).<sup>585</sup> Ultimately, none of the paradoxes possess the mutual qualification aspect of a co-inherent paradox, but most of them (except dying and living in v. 9b) co-ordinate opposites in such a way that the construction still expresses a formal paradox: two opposed but simultaneously true realities.<sup>586</sup>

The objection might be raised that the formulations of v. 8b-10 are not *paradoxes* at all, but simply *differences of perspective* meant to stymie Paul's opponents. So Paul appears poor to his rivals, yet he makes many rich; Paul seems to be dying, yet he is

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<sup>584</sup> E.g. Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:463; Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 283; cf. Matera, *Corinthians*, 154.

<sup>585</sup> In other words, the ἰδοὺ implies that life comes into existence rather than being simultaneously paired with death from the beginning. See e.g. Rom. 9.33 and 2 Cor. 12.14.

<sup>586</sup> See sec. III.ii of Ch. 3 for a delineation of the three kinds of paradox identified in this study. Although it is difficult to discern whether there is any significance to Paul's transition from καί (v. 8-9) to δέ (v. 10) in his paradoxical formula, these conjunctions have a common purpose: to ensure that two opposing entities are read and interpreted together. On this coordinating function, see Wallace, *Greek*, 667-669. For more on Paul's conjunction transition, see e.g. Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 289-90; Harris, *Corinthians*, 465-67; Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 283.

alive.<sup>587</sup> This is a rhetorically useful explanation for Paul's formulations, but it encounters difficulties in light of the apostle's explicit acceptance of his opponents' charges: the apostle really believes that he is weak (12.6; 11.21).<sup>588</sup> The difference between Paul and his Corinthian audience lies in the nuance that he finds strength *simultaneously* in weakness, rather than viewing these realities as totally incompatible with one another.<sup>589</sup> This is confirmed by the catalogue's structure, where the hardships and virtues are not destroyed (v. 4-7); rather, they are placed in co-existent, even simultaneous relationship (v. 8b-10).

With respect to function, many interpreters focus on the repeated use of ὥς, arguing that this conjunction refers to a universal perception or appearance.<sup>590</sup> So Paul generally *appears* poor (even to those outside of Corinth), yet he makes many rich in a deeper, spiritual sense (v. 10). Although the revelatory category of paradox is not employed here, this line of argument favours the view that these paradoxes are essentially an inward/outward dichotomy. In this sense, the paradox derives from revealed knowledge which enables one to perceive Paul's inward strength despite his outward appearance.<sup>591</sup> This leads interpreters to make comparisons between Pauline and Stoic formulations because both appear to contrast one's appearance with an inner reality. But there is little, if any, recognition that this is only one way—i.e. the revelatory view—to interpret the strength in weakness paradox, so other positions must be considered.<sup>592</sup> A key figure here is Fitzgerald, who emphasizes that Paul and the Stoics shared certain paradoxes: e.g. only the wise man is truly rich (cf. v. 10b) and only the wise man is truly happy (cf. v. 10a).<sup>593</sup> His

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<sup>587</sup> E.g. Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:463; Furnish, *Corinthians*, 357.

<sup>588</sup> To be fair, he elsewhere makes this proclamation ironically (e.g. 12.11). See sec. V.i of Ch. 5.

<sup>589</sup> As discussed in sec. VII.i of Ch. 3, the apostle's envisioned relationship between strength and weakness is far more developed than this. But a simultaneous co-existence is the furthest he pushes the relationship in 6.3-13.

<sup>590</sup> See e.g. Barnett, *Corinthians*, 331 and Furnish, *Corinthians*, 346.

<sup>591</sup> See sec. III.ii.a of Ch. 5 for a fuller description of the revelatory interpretation.

<sup>592</sup> See e.g. Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 290-91; Schmeller, *Korinther*, I:343-44; Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:454.

<sup>593</sup> Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 190-96.

influence is apparent in translations that begin v. 8b by inserting, '*We are treated as imposters, yet are true*' (italics mine).<sup>594</sup> The logical conclusion of this reading is signalled by Fitzgerald's proclamation that Paul views weakness only as a 'foil' for God's strength.<sup>595</sup>

It is certainly difficult to deny some similarities between the paradoxes of v. 8b-10 and Stoic paradoxes, especially the simultaneous occurrence of opposing entities and having inward realities counterbalance shallow appearances.<sup>596</sup> But Fitzgerald's view is problematic not least because weakness becomes only a means to strength, and thus fails to preserve the strong sense of co-existence in v. 8b-10 (i.e. weakness does not melt in the face of strength). The chief difficulty, however, is the inherently Christological nature of Paul's strength in weakness paradoxes (e.g. 13.4; 5.14-15).<sup>597</sup> Paul's understanding of weakness cannot be confined to mere perception, unless he believed that Jesus only *appeared* to be crucified!<sup>598</sup> This is evident in the paradoxes themselves, where only some support an inner/outer distinction (e.g. imposter-true [v. 8b], having nothing-possessing everything [v. 10b]). Otherwise, Paul appears poor, yet makes others rich, meaning that in his poverty (likely an internal and external reality) he is still able to serve others (v. 10a).<sup>599</sup> Paul even says that he is 'sorrowful [λῶπέω]' yet 'always rejoicing [χαίρω]' (v. 10a). In light of his cognitive view of the emotions, this allusion to the Corinthians' pains presents opposites that register as *both* inward and outward realities—joy begins with the will and concludes in outward expressions.<sup>600</sup> There is no dichotomy between inward strength and

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<sup>594</sup> The translations using this insertion include the ESV and NRSV. The text, however, simply starts with the ὥς as reflected in the KJV, NIV, and NLT—e.g. 'As unknown, yet known' (v. 9) (my translation).

<sup>595</sup> Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 169-70.

<sup>596</sup> For more on these details of Stoic paradox, see Cicero, *Paradoxa*, 10ff and Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 45-58.

<sup>597</sup> See e.g. Schmeller, *Korinther*, I:349-50 and Manus, 'Suffering', 46-49.

<sup>598</sup> For more on the horror of crucifixion in the ancient world, see Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977), 10-32.

<sup>599</sup> Barrett, *Corinthians*, 190 and Barnett, *Corinthians*, 333.

<sup>600</sup> For more on Paul's theory of emotions, particularly this movement, see sec. II.i of Ch. 2.

external weakness. One should also recall the situation being addressed in v. 8b-10: the Corinthians are embroiled in pains that prevent a proper relationship with Paul. To address this situation, experiences of weakness that move beyond the superficial are necessary—anything to the contrary would trivialize the Corinthians' experience and decimate their tenuous relations with Paul. The paradoxes must point to a 'concrete reality' which holds significance beyond the perception of a crowd.<sup>601</sup>

So it is with the relational context in mind that the function of Paul's paradoxes begins to reveal itself. The apostle begins by addressing the Corinthians directly, urging them not to receive the intrusive grace of God in vain (v. 1). He then commends himself, not simply to defend his ministry, but to present himself as one who has been changed by God's grace (v. 3-4). This grace binds together realities in Paul's life that would otherwise be only opposed (v. 4b-8a), making Paul a model of strength in weakness where these entities occur in co-existent, even simultaneous relationships (v. 8b-10). In particular, these paradoxes would revolutionize the Corinthians' experience—invoked by Paul's reference to pain (v. 10)—not least because they would provide access to strength in the midst of weakness and thus create the possibility of moving beyond the problems of pain to reconcile with God (v. 1). In this sense, the paradoxes do not just serve to reveal an otherwise hidden truth; they describe a divinely created transformation that produces tangible change in the life of the community. This will become even clearer as I reflect upon the argument in v. 8b-10.

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<sup>601</sup> Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 296. Also, Schmeller, *Korinther*, I:355-60 concludes that some of the paradoxes in v. 8b-10 are abiding realities rather than revelatory in function. But the consensus is certainly that these paradoxes are revelatory (e.g. Güttgemanns, *Apostel*, 304-4, 316-17; Martin, *Corinthians*, 180-81; Barrett, *Corinthians*, 188-89).

iii. *Living Paradoxically: The Implication of a Broad Collection of Paradoxes*

Having clarified the nature of the paradoxes in v. 8b-10, I can consider the *extent* to which these formulations are transformative through one of their more obvious yet important characteristics: they exist within a collection. Although one could certainly conduct detailed studies on each paradox, they resist being interpreted individually given their collective presentation. To analyze them individually would detract from their combined breadth, a significant characteristic given Paul's interest in *comprehensive* transformation.<sup>602</sup> The paradoxes of 'imposters' and 'true' (v. 8b); 'unknown' and 'well known' (v. 9a); and 'nothing' and 'everything' (v. 10b) relate to knowledge or perception, while the paradox of 'poor' and 'making many rich' (v. 10a) ultimately relates to behaviour.<sup>603</sup> Paul's reference to 'dying' and 'living' (v. 9a) likely has a general validity whereas the paradox of being 'punished' but not 'killed' (v. 9b) refers to external circumstances beyond Paul's control.<sup>604</sup> Lest anyone think the apostle refers only to himself, he speaks of being 'sorrowful [λυπούμενοι], yet always rejoicing' (v. 10) which, as suggested above, takes up the Corinthians' pains and implies that these can be experienced alongside real joy. Ultimately, this paradox combines with the others to create a portrait so varied that Paul has forged a paradoxical view of reality itself.

This sweeping overview of human experience offers the opportunity to address a suggestion made earlier in this thesis: Paul's language of strength and weakness concerns personal identity.<sup>605</sup> Of course, the direct language of strength and weakness is not being

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<sup>602</sup> See esp. sec. III of Ch. 3.

<sup>603</sup> See e.g. the use of *πλάνο*s ('imposter') in 1 Tim. 4.1 and *ἀγνόεω* (to be unknown) in 1 Cor. 14.38 and Gal. 1.22. Each suggests a strong emphasis on knowledge. I have taken the poor/rich paradox in v. 10a to refer to behaviour given the apostle's use of *πλούτιζω* rather than a noun/adjective. The meaning seems to be that Paul is poor in spirit yet he enriches the lives of those in his community (e.g. 2 Cor. 1.15, 4.15).

<sup>604</sup> For more on the dying/living paradox (v. 9a), see esp. sec. II-III of Ch.3. The meaning of the latter can be discerned through Paul's use of *παιδεύω* in 1 Cor. 11.32; cf. 1 Tim. 1.20.

<sup>605</sup> See sec. IV.i of Ch. 2.



employed here, and Paul will not do so concerning his identity until 12.9-10.<sup>606</sup> But in 6.4b-10, Paul uses his suffering terms—which contribute to his concepts of strength and weakness—to describe how the paradox permeates his entire life. Hotze summarizes the catalogue's meaning by saying that Paul lives in 'two different "worlds"'—that of the flesh and that of the spirit.<sup>607</sup> But the paradox is not a battle between two contrasted realities, there is also congruity between them due to their *co-ordinated co-existence* (i.e. the *ὡς...καί/δέ* formula in v. 8b-10). Paul does not so much live in *two worlds* as he is able to enter a *new world* through the strength in weakness paradox in the sense that it turns him into a *different person*.<sup>608</sup> He is now dead and alive (v. 9), rather than finding only 'afflictions, hardships, calamities' (v. 4). This is especially important for the Corinthians to observe in their pains. The paradox has liberated Paul from the polarity which continues to entrench them in a deep-seated depression. The Corinthians must not receive grace in vain (v. 1), lest they lose the opportunity to experience God's creation of paradoxes that unite the poles of their bipolar existence to create a new way of life.

Luther likewise counseled his protector Frederick the Wise (a well-known collector of relics) to endure suffering with these words: 'For many years Your Grace has been acquiring relics in every land, but God has now heard Your Grace's request and has sent Your Grace, without cost or trouble, a whole cross together with nails, spears, and scourges. I say again: grace and joy from God on the acquisition of a new relic!'<sup>609</sup> Although Paul is not dealing with relics in 2 Corinthians, he shares with Luther a concern for personal transformation: what was despicable for both Frederick and the Corinthians

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<sup>606</sup> See sec. IV of Ch. 5.

<sup>607</sup> Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 298.

<sup>608</sup> *Contra* John Chrysostom (*Hom. 2 Cor. XXVII.1*) who envisions the hardship catalogue (v. 4b-10) as the vindication of Paul's battle with the flesh: 'Any one of these things is intolerable, but taken together, think what kind of soul is needed to endure them'.

<sup>609</sup> LW 48:387 ('A Letter to Frederick the Wise').

must be incorporated into their lives, not as a concession, but as an integral component of their devotion to Christ. Strength and weakness can co-exist, and the impact of this incorporation is detailed in v. 11-13, where Paul indicates the most important change that the paradox enables: the newfound ability to reconcile with the apostle himself.

#### *iv. Summary*

Before considering the possible connection between the paradoxes of 6.8b-10 and Paul's call for reconciliation (v. 11-13), I offer a brief summary of this section. I began by arguing that too many interpreters err by viewing the hardship catalogue as Paul's self-glorification. Within a conflict setting, this is unlikely as it would have been contested by the community and would have only furthered the ill sentiment towards Paul in Corinth. To identify a new line of enquiry, I investigated the structure of the hardship catalogue, where I observed an overlooked development: Paul begins by listing separate hardships and virtues (v. 4b-8a) which culminate in what appear to be paradoxical statements (v. 8b-10).

I confirmed that the formulations of v. 8b-10 are paradoxes as their *ὡς...καί/δέ* formula implies the simultaneous existence of opposites. Each paradox is distinctive, with some being sequential (e.g. v. 9a) and others simultaneous (v. 10), but each lacks the sense of mutual qualification seen in previous chapters. Although it is common for interpreters to understand them as revelatory phenomena (i.e. an inner/outer dichotomy), I observed that some of the paradoxes do not support this reading (e.g. v. 10) and, given Paul's allusion to the Corinthians' pain (*λύπη*), one must read these paradoxes for their utility in bringing about reconciliation—they are inherently transformative phenomena. This is underlined by their collective presence, which spans Paul's emotions, knowledge, attitude, and behaviour. Paul paints a paradoxical view of reality, in which one's identity is re-defined by the

strength in weakness paradox. This is preparatory for the following section, where I detail Paul's application of the paradox to a difficult task: kindling affection for one's enemy.

## V. The Paradox that Produces Reconciliation (v. 11-13)

### *i. Paul's Pastoral Realism: The Connection Between v. 1-10 and v. 11-13*

The paragraph in v. 11-13—sandwiched between the larger discourses of v. 3-10 and v. 14-19—is one of the most overlooked in 2 Corinthians.<sup>610</sup> It begins with Paul declaring that he has 'spoken frankly [τὸ στόμα ἡμῶν ἀνέφγεν]' to the Corinthians and his 'heart [καρδία]' is 'wide open [πλατύνω]' to them (v. 11). On the other hand, the community's affections are restricted (v. 12), causing Paul to demand that they 'open wide [πλατύνω]' their hearts (v. 13). This is Paul's second address to the community in this passage, but with a twist: rather than reconciliation with God, he asks the Corinthians to directly reconcile with him. The main interpretive difficulty lies in Paul's logic, where it is not easy to discern how he moves from the hardship catalogue to the request for reconciliation. As early as Chrysostom, interpreters considered v. 11-13 to be a digression.<sup>611</sup> But many now consider v. 3-10 to be parenthetical.<sup>612</sup> On this latter reading, the apostle began an argument concerning the Corinthians and their potential for receiving 'the grace of God in vain' (v. 1). This is interrupted by Paul's elucidation of his sufferings (v. 3-10) before he returns to his argument and asks the community to reconcile (v. 11-13). Those favouring this interpretation tend to treat Paul's 'open mouth' and 'open heart' declarations as evidence that the apostle still considers the community to be his friends.<sup>613</sup> Calvin comments, 'Hence Paul here says nothing but what we every day experience, for

<sup>610</sup> See p. 158-59 above.

<sup>611</sup> John Chrysostom, *Hom. 2 Cor.* XIII.1. See also e.g. Calvin, *Corinthians*, II: 254-55; Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 342; Manus, 'Suffering', 41.

<sup>612</sup> See p. 172-73 above.

<sup>613</sup> See e.g. Martin, *Corinthians*, 185 and Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 286.

when we have to do with friends, our *heart is enlarged*, all our feelings are laid open, there is nothing there that is hid, nothing shut,—nay more, the whole mind leaps and exults to unfold itself openly to view.<sup>614</sup>

The difficulty with the interpretation above is that it completely overlooks the dire nature of the conflict between Paul and Corinth. The severity of this is noted throughout the letter (e.g. 1.3-7, 2.1-7) and especially in v. 11-13—Paul clearly states that his affection for the Corinthians is not reciprocated (v. 13). If the Corinthians have been so deeply pained by Paul, the solution to this fracas is unlikely to be reminding the community of their mutual friendship! A similar response could be given to those who read v. 11-13 purely as a demand for reciprocity: Paul desires reconciliation with the Corinthians and he asks for the same commitment in return.<sup>615</sup> There is no denying that Paul demands reciprocity in v. 11-13; however, it seems shallow to suggest that a simple command is the only balm required for the Corinthians to overcome their wounds and unite with their apostle. Thrall recognizes that 'perhaps it was asking too much of human nature' for the Corinthians to respond appropriately to Paul by virtue of a single command.<sup>616</sup> But she could afford to make a much stronger claim. What is lacking in interpretations of v. 11-13 is an awareness of Paul's *pastoral realism*: his sensitivity to the debilitating effects of the Corinthians' pains (e.g. 2.1-7; 1.8-11), and most of all, his effort to re-package his gospel to show how Christ helps the Corinthians in their weakness (e.g. 1.9-10; 4.7-12). Paul knows that the Corinthians require a divine transformation to enact reconciliation with him, thus

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<sup>614</sup> Calvin, *Corinthians*, II: 255.

<sup>615</sup> See e.g. Marlene Crüsemann, 'Das weite Herz und die Gemeinschaft der Heiligen: 2 Kor 6,11-7,4 im Sozialgeschichtlichen Kontext', in *Dem Tod nicht glauben. Sozialgeschichtlichen Kontext.*, ed. Frank Crüsemann (Gütersloh: Gütersloh Verlagshaus, 2004), 360-62; Minor, *Corinthians*, 129-30; Schmeller, *Korinther*, I:365-66; and Garland, *Corinthians*, 329.

<sup>616</sup> Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:470-71.

suggesting that the explanations above do not fully capture how Paul tries to persuade the Corinthians toward reconciliation.

A more satisfying explanation for the connection between v. 1-10 and v. 11-13 is to place greater emphasis on the hardship catalogue. Those following this interpretation stress that Paul demonstrates his dedication and loyalty to the community through the dangers endured for their sake (v. 3-10). On the basis of Paul's character and apostolic worthiness, the Corinthians should kindle warm affections for him (v. 12-13).<sup>617</sup> But even this option does not explain precisely how the Corinthians—opposed to Paul's experiences of strength in weakness (v. 8b-10)—might actually embrace their apostle and his lifestyle. In other words, the prevailing apologetic paradigm appears to blind interpreters to the explicit nature of Paul's argument. He is not simply defending himself, but doing so with the hope that the community might experience the transformative power of God's intrusive grace (cf. 6.1). The Corinthians are poor in spirit and giving nothing to Paul, dying and not yet alive. They must become more like Paul, and thus more like Christ: poor yet making many rich, dying yet living. The apologetic reading nonetheless helps to establish what should already be self-evident: the *crux interpretum* of the passage lies in the hardship catalogue. On my view, it is specifically the culmination of the catalogue, where—as predicted—Paul has fashioned new paradoxes (v. 8-10) that lead into a new kind of reconciliation (v. 11-13).<sup>618</sup> God reconciled humanity to himself in Christ (5.21), and now Paul will link the transformation of strength in weakness to reconciliation with Corinth. This resonates with 1.8-11, where Paul describes his paradoxical affliction in Asia before expecting the Corinthians to pray for him. It only remains to be seen how, specifically, Paul thinks the paradox will aid reconciliation and what, in the first place, might be preventing this.

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<sup>617</sup> See e.g. Barnett, *Corinthians*, 334-35 and Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 271. Bieringer, 'Liebe', 212-13 represents a permutation of this view.

<sup>618</sup> For the initial paradox-reconciliation pattern that Paul follows here, see p. 166-68 above.

*ii. Shrivelled Hearts in Corinth: The Site of Paradoxical Transformation (v. 11, 13)*

With the prospect of the paradox producing reconciliation between Paul and Corinth, I want to consider why Paul might appeal to a paradox for this purpose. I have previously observed that he does so in light of the deeply problematic nature of the Corinthians' pains.<sup>619</sup> But is there any evidence that Paul identifies the community's pains in v. 11-13 (beyond allusions in v. 1-2, 9), let alone believes them to require divine intervention? A promising line of enquiry concerns two key concepts in v. 11-13: the heart (καρδία) and the affections (σπλάγγχον). The apostle claims that he has a 'wide open' heart for the Corinthians (v. 11), meanwhile the Corinthians have restricted affections (v. 12) and need to 'open wide' their hearts (v. 13). This sequence suggests that the heart and the affections are synonymous—it is because the Corinthians have restricted affections that Paul demands an open heart.<sup>620</sup> Both terms refer to the 'seat of the emotions', and 'especially those of pity and love'.<sup>621</sup>

At this point, the literature on the affections in v. 11-13 becomes rather scarce. Several commentators largely gloss over these verses, and Matera provides only one sentence of comment.<sup>622</sup> This is surprising given that Paul mentions the heart earlier in his argument as an interest of his ministry (5.12). I suggest that Paul's references to καρδία in v. 11-13 are casualties of the prevailing research paradigm, where interpreters allow the deeply personal, affective elements of the apostle's argument to be lost amidst their general conclusion that Paul is locked in a war of words. The language of the heart has little place within a paradigm that focuses upon a clash of worldviews and the ensuing battle for the community's loyalty. To be fair, these verses are written in a context of conflict where Paul

<sup>619</sup> See sec. IV.i.d of Ch. 2 and sec. III.iii of Ch. 3.

<sup>620</sup> Bieringer, 'Liebe', 190-193 and Stegman, *Corinthians*, 162.

<sup>621</sup> Harris, *Corinthians*, 490.

<sup>622</sup> E.g. Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 271 and Matera, *Corinthians*, 156-157. Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 287-300 notably tries to understand the paradoxes in 6.8b-10 without any reference to v. 11-13.

defends himself. But his references to the heart indicate that more is at stake. The apostle often uses καρδιά for the innermost component of a person (Rom. 1.21; 10.1; Phil 1.7), specifically the place where God works (1 Th. 2.4; Rom. 8.27) and Christ dwells (Gal. 4.6; 1 Th. 3.13). Jewett comments that Paul's use of καρδιά 'depict[s] the whole person in such a way that his Hebraic assumption of a psycho-somatic unity of man in thinking, willing, emoting, acting, and responding to God and fellowman is clearly evident. A characteristic of the heart as the center of man is its inherent openness to outside impulses...its propensity to give itself to a master and to live towards some desired goal.'<sup>623</sup> So Paul is not only concerned with the Corinthians' poor theology, their loyalty, or his own reputation; rather, the apostle writes with the concern that the community has lost their very selves. The Corinthians' identity is at issue, especially their ability to love. Bieringer concludes that Paul's open heart indicates his desire for reconciliation, particularly his 'love for the community'.<sup>624</sup> It follows that the Corinthians' restricted affections are damaging their identity as a whole, expressed especially in their muted—even non-existent—love for Paul.

In order to fully discover the problem that Paul identifies in Corinth, however, one has to allow the apostle's imagery to identify precisely what lies behind the Corinthians' closed hearts. Paul is concerned with an impediment in Corinth that is restricting their affections toward him. Interpreters offer little insight on this barrier, concluding that the community's affections are restricted precisely because they are in conflict with Paul.<sup>625</sup> But one should be specific: the Corinthians' animosity toward Paul amounts to a deep-seated, affective problem at the very centre of their being. The only discrete issues mentioned within 2 Corinthians that would satisfy this description are the negative

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<sup>623</sup> Robert Jewett, *Paul's Anthropological Terms: A Study of Their Use in Conflict Settings* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 313. Also see Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1975), 84.

<sup>624</sup> Bieringer, 'Liebe', 193-95.

<sup>625</sup> See e.g. Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 286; Martin, *Corinthians*, 186; Calvin, *Corinthians*, II: 256.

emotions created by the apostle's previous visit and letter (e.g. 2.1-7; 7.5-16).<sup>626</sup> In light of Paul's references to a heart's openness and restriction (v. 12), the possibility of an allusion to the Corinthians' pain is strengthened by the ancient practice of likening an experience of λύπη to a *shrinking* of one's body or soul.<sup>627</sup> Stobaeus believes pain causes a wincing of the ψυχή,<sup>628</sup> and Dio Chrysostom observes that an individual blighted with pain becomes 'shrunk [συστέλλω] and scowling and distorted in appearance'.<sup>629</sup> Paul appears to stand in this tradition not only through his use of restriction language but by attesting that pain is a matter of the heart: 'I have great sorrow [λύπη]...in my heart [καρδία]' (Rom. 9.2).<sup>630</sup> So the heart language of v. 11-13 likely identifies the Corinthians' pains as the cause of their restricted affections and thus the barrier to reconciliation with Paul.

This characterization of the Corinthians' pain matches previous observations concerning the polarity of strength and weakness. Far from being *enabled* to reconcile, the Corinthians are *disabled* by their pain (e.g. 2.1-7; 1.3-7). It serves as a torturous master for their hearts that places clamps on their affections, winnowing away any positive emotion toward Paul. In fact, it has sent the entire community into a 'spiral of shame' that not only threatens their relationship with Paul but the very core of their being.<sup>631</sup> Far from modelling the outward-focused nature of Paul, influenced by the Christ gift (5.14-15) and having a ministry that pierces the heart (5.12), the Corinthians are paralyzed by pain. In light of this

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<sup>626</sup> For the meaning of σπλάγγνον and how it might relate to λυπ- words, see e.g. 2 Cor. 7.15, Phil. 1.18, Philem. 12 and esp. 'σπλάγγνον', BDAG (3rd ed.), p. 938.

<sup>627</sup> For further discussion, see Graver, *Emotion*, 28, 105. To be fair, there are many attitudes or experiences that could cause the heart to shrink. For instance, Martin, *Corinthians*, 186, explains these references with respect to 'popular Greek moral philosophy' which said that 'selfishness and suspicion' caused the heart to shrink (e.g. Epictetus 1.25, 26-29 and Lucian *Nigr* 13). While Martin's suggestion is not incompatible with my own, the imagery is best understood with respect to the Corinthians' λύπη given Paul's consistent interest with this emotion and the paucity of explicit references to selfishness and suspicion.

<sup>628</sup> Eccl. 2.7.10b (90W). Also see Philo, *QG* 2.57.

<sup>629</sup> *Or.* 16.2-3.

<sup>630</sup> Also see Jn. 16.6.

<sup>631</sup> See sec. IV.ii of Ch. 2.



diagnosis, the immediate context yields a course of treatment: an experience of strength in weakness that frees the Corinthians' hearts and re-wires them to exude love for the apostle.

*iii. The Paradoxical Logic of Reconciliation (v. 11)*

Paul begins his call for reconciliation by proclaiming, 'Our mouth [στόμα] has opened [ἀνέωγεν] to you, Corinthians' (v. 11). According to Bieringer, this phrase has no clear counterpart in the New Testament, so its meaning is best determined by context.<sup>632</sup> It is possible that Paul refers to his openness across 2 Corinthians (e.g. 1.8; 1.17-19), but some interpreters rightly focus on 6.3-10: Paul is vulnerable with the Corinthians through the weaknesses described in the hardship catalogue.<sup>633</sup> His willingness to reconcile is highlighted by his use of the vocative Κορίνθιοι (v. 11)—unique in his letters—which most interpreters take as evidence of a strong interest in the community.<sup>634</sup> However, Paul has not only been speaking freely to the Corinthians; he has revealed the *justification* for doing so. Unlike the community, Paul is not chained by a polarity of strength or weakness; rather, the paradox enables him to face the community who pains him because he is 'sorrowful, yet always rejoicing' (v. 10). As his pain takes hold, his joy matches its vigour.

Paul's appeal to the paradox should be far from surprising at this point. His adumbration of pain's paralyzing effects on the Corinthians' hearts implies the need for a Godsend such as the strength in weakness paradox. Furthermore, he has used the whole passage to weave threads together that support the use of paradox. He showed that a Christological paradox enacted reconciliation between God and humanity (5.21), thus implying that his next appeal for reconciliation—between himself and Corinth—would utilize a paradox. He envisioned God's intrusive grace bringing to Corinth a rescue so great

<sup>632</sup> Bieringer, 'Liebe', 198-200.

<sup>633</sup> See e.g. Martin, *Corinthians*, 185 and Barrett, *Corinthians*, 191; cf. Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 286 and Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 343.

<sup>634</sup> See e.g. Bieringer, 'Liebe', 201-2; Schmeller, *Korinther*, I:363-64; Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:468.

that it would be like the 'day of salvation' (v. 2). Finally, he used the hardship catalogue to reveal the intricate nature of the paradox: its use of opposites which become surprisingly simultaneous (v. 8b-10). Above all, Paul describes the Christ event—the paradox of paradoxes—as an outward-focused phenomenon (5.14-5) that is present in the first paradox of the passage (5.21) and evidently shapes Paul in the second set of paradoxes (v. 8b-10). Paul's use of *πρὸς ὑμᾶς* (v. 11) echoes the moment when Christ became sin 'for our sake [*ὕπερ ἡμῶν*]' (5.21). But this is not a rote work of mimicry, the mere ethicizing of the cross. This becomes more evident in the next sentence, where Paul maintains that his heart has literally 'been enlarged' (v. 11b).<sup>635</sup> His free speech and care for the community were *created* by an 'open heart surgery' of sorts, a thorough heart *expansion*. Paul has not received the grace of God in vain (6.1; cf. 4.15); instead, this grace has freed Paul from his polarity and provided him with joy in sorrow, life in death, strength in weakness. The implication for how Paul relates to others, including the Corinthians, is clear. As Luther says, 'I will therefore give myself as a sort of Christ, to my neighbour, as Christ has given Himself to me; and will do nothing in this life except what I see will be needful, advantageous, and wholesome for my neighbour, since by faith I abound in all good things in Christ.'<sup>636</sup> Christ has redeemed Paul's vulnerabilities so that he can be vulnerable with the Corinthians.

Despite the relevance of the above, one must be careful here to identify the primary connection between the paradoxes of v. 8b-10 and Paul's interest in reconciliation in v. 11-13. The main thrust of v. 8b-10 is the comprehensive nature of the paradox's impact—one's knowledge, emotions, and behaviour.<sup>637</sup> Within a paradoxical view of reality, Paul

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<sup>635</sup> Harris, *Corinthians*, 488. Also see Marlene Crüsemann, 'Herz', 351; Schmeller; *Korinther*; I:363-64; and Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 286.

<sup>636</sup> LW 31:367 (The Freedom of the Christian).

<sup>637</sup> See p. 179-81 above.

emphasizes the co-existence of opposite experiences. Although these do not attain the threshold of mutual qualification, one cannot possibly understand a single strength (i.e. being well-known, alive, rich) apart from a single weakness (i.e. dying, being poor). This suggests that the strength in weakness paradox provides Paul with both the strength and the weakness necessary to enact a change in his relationship with Corinth. The intrusive grace of God pulls together what, in Paul's life, was only opposed. Paul becomes strong enough to initiate reconciliation, but weak enough to resist pride and indicate what is best for the Corinthians: a return to their apostle (v. 11), and thus to God himself (5.18-20). So the apostle does not begin an argument in 6.1-4b only to be overcome with emotion in v. 4b-10 and later resume his entreaty. Instead, the apostle states his wish for reconciliation (v. 1-4a), provides its basis (v. 8b-10), and reiterates his conclusion (v. 11). As a result, Paul enacts a *paradoxical logic of reconciliation* that will only grow deeper as he turns to the Corinthians to demand reciprocity. This outward-moving paradox is gaining momentum, and it is hurtling at the community with all of the power and precision of God himself.

*iv. A Mutual Transformation: Making Paradoxical Peace with the Enemy (v. 12-13)*

Upon revealing the work of the paradox in his heart, the apostle turns to the subject of his affections: the Corinthians themselves. He asserts that the Corinthians are not 'restricted [στενοχωρεῖσθε]' by him but by their own 'affections [σπλάγχνοις]' (v. 12). Of course, this statement overlooks how Paul's painful visit and letter initiated the Corinthians' pains (2.1-7; 7.5-16). These difficult relational realities remind the reader that the argument in v. 11-13 is, in some sense, answering the question: how can I reconcile with my enemy, with the 'ultimate other'?<sup>638</sup> Paul's answer must be sufficiently powerful to overcome the Corinthian polarity between strength and weakness that produces tunnel vision: their single

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<sup>638</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 9.

goal is to overcome their weaknesses. This means that Paul is a loathsome figure, the embodiment of everything the Corinthians hate about themselves (e.g. 10.10). So they make him the enemy. As Volf says, 'The stronger the conflict, the more the rich texture of the social world disappears and the stark exclusionary polarity emerges around which all thought and practice aligns itself'.<sup>639</sup>

Amidst the turmoil of the Paul-Corinth relationship, God continues to conduct his intrusive work through the apostle. The solution for the Corinthians' polarity seems simple at first glance: 'In return...widen [πλατύνω] your hearts also' (v. 13). Paul desires the Corinthians to undergo the same transformation which benefited him. This is suggested by the use of 'in return [τὴν...αὐτὴν ἀντιμισθίαν]' and 'also [καί]' (v. 13), highlighting the desired reciprocity. Most importantly, there is Paul's overlooked use of a passive verb (πλατύνθητε) to refer to the widening of the Corinthians' hearts, which suggests that another agent, likely God himself (5.18-6.1), is to perform this spiritual surgery. Although Paul refers to his standing as the community's father in v. 13—stating that he speaks 'as to children [τέκνοις]'—this cannot be the chief grounds on which the apostle desires reconciliation. What effect would an appeal to love for their father have? The Corinthians need to be transformed and reconciled with Paul before his status has any utility.

One must return to the paradoxical world of v. 8b-10 to understand how God's work in the paradox empowers the Corinthians to reconcile with Paul. In particular, the co-existence of strength and weakness in Paul's life reminds the Corinthians that their pains, like Paul's (v. 10), can be rendered useful and productive in the Christian life. Their deep sense of insecurity and shame forms the bedrock of the humility and self-negation needed

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<sup>639</sup> Ibid., 99. Here Volf uses the term 'polarity' to refer to the tendency of individuals in conflict to become highly antagonistic and thus exclude one another in a variety of ways. When I refer to the strength and weakness polarity, I am considering a totally different phenomenon, but some of its symptoms are the same—e.g. the antagonism toward someone perceived to be the opposite of what one desires or who one claims to be.

to reconcile with one's enemy, especially one so weak as Paul. More importantly, the paradox of strength in weakness is a stabilizing force for a community that oscillates between the two realities. The addition of strength to the community's pains prevents the pains from inaugurating the polarity that fuels their hatred of Paul. Wherever weakness persists, strength is present too, thus limiting the instability inherent to the Corinthians' rebellion. The Corinthians possess a naked concept of strength and weakness, which either desperately searches for a place to hide its immodesty or streaks across town drawing too much attention to itself. But like clothing on the body, distinct yet inseparable to the movement of one's limbs, Paul wants the Corinthians' weakness to be clothed with strength. It is only then that they will be sufficiently content to love Paul without inhibitions and return to his gospel.

This is a key reason why I have argued against models of the paradox that treat weakness merely as a 'foil' for God's strength.<sup>640</sup> Most interpreters believe that Paul simply wants the Corinthians to leave behind the pains created by his previous visit and letter.<sup>641</sup> But this is not so! Paul wants the Corinthians' pains to be paradoxically related to their strength—no small revolution itself—and thus taken up into the paradox. As storms develop along the Corinthians' journey, they are not diverted off course or forced to pull to the side of the road; instead, their difficulties are cycled into the whirlwind of the paradox. This perfect storm relates the Corinthians' weaknesses to strength and thus, like the original paradox of the Christ event, the community would achieve outward-focused vulnerability. The weaknesses that once inhibited them would result in humility without self-loathing and initiative without self-centered behaviour. In this way, the Corinthians' pains are to no longer *prevent* reconciliation with Paul; they *enable* it. This suggests that Paul stands as the

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<sup>640</sup> Fitzgerald, *Cracks*, 169-70.

<sup>641</sup> See e.g. Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:163-77; Barrett, *Corinthians*, 209; Collins, *Corinthians*, 48-49.

inaugurator of the anthropological tradition linked to Irenaeus, which grants weakness a key place in 'the vale of soul-making'.<sup>642</sup> But crucially, too many interpreters—perhaps even Irenaeus himself—do not fully capture Paul's thought on the matter. He does not view weakness as *inherently* redemptive through the achievement of Gorman's 'cruciformity' or Perkins' 'self as sufferer' model; rather, weakness is only redemptive in the sense that it is *paradoxically congruent* with resurrection power.<sup>643</sup> It is the simultaneous redemption of weakness by strength, without conflating the two, that produces transformation. This is significant for 2 Corinthians studies, where interpreters routinely fail to think paradoxically and, in doing so, jeopardize the theological integrity of Paul's argument.

#### v. *Summary*

I began by considering the significance of Paul's 'pastoral realism' for proposed connections between v. 8b-10 and v. 11-13. Most interpreters believe Paul makes a call for reconciliation through a simple demand for reciprocity or even on the basis of any remaining feelings of friendship he might have with the community. While Paul does demand reciprocity, I argue that he has already shown far more sensitivity to the issues preventing reconciliation. In light of the aforementioned paradox-reconciliation pattern (5.21-6.1), I suggest that the paradoxes of v. 8b-10 must somehow enable reconciliation between Paul and Corinth. The need for paradoxes—as transformative instruments of God's grace (6.1)—is underlined by Paul's references to the Corinthians' restricted affections (v. 12-13). There is an underlying problem in Corinth that moves beyond bad theology and Paul's diminished reputation—the community has lost its identity. The ancient parallels between Paul's restriction language and experiences of λύπη suggest that

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<sup>642</sup>John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: MacMillan, 1985), 259. Also see Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* III.20.

<sup>643</sup>Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 75-94; Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1-14.

at the heart of the Corinthians' resistance to reconciliation is their festering pain created by Paul's previous visit and letter (cf. 2.1-7).

The apostle aims to overcome the Corinthians' pain by enacting a 'paradoxical logic of reconciliation'. First, he indicates his own interest in reconciliation (v. 11), which is the result of the paradoxical world that he sketched earlier (v. 8b-10). Within this world, he learns to embody the strength in weakness paradox, thus creating the requisite initiative to reconcile and the necessary humility to resist pride and do what is best for the Corinthians. Paul indicates that he wants the Corinthians to undergo the same transformation (v. 13a), but it will carry far more radical implications. The co-existence of opposites (v. 8b-10) suggests that the Corinthians' ongoing battle with weakness is to have a role in enacting reconciliation: it *enables* reconciliation, rather than disabling it, by providing the deep humility necessary to reconcile with an enemy, especially one as weak as the apostle Paul.

## VI. Glimpses of the Paradox's First Fruits in 2 Corinthians 7

### *i. The Return of Paul's Paradoxical Comfort (v. 1-7)*

In 2 Corinthians 7, the apostle quickly returns to his entreaty from 6.11-13: 'Make room in your hearts [χωρέω] for us' (v. 2).<sup>644</sup> He mentions his conduct (v. 2b) before indicating that he maintains his affection for the community—they are 'in our hearts' (v. 3). So Paul boasts and gains 'consolation [παράκλησις]' (v. 4). While this mixture of affection and conflict is puzzling, I argued earlier that the Corinthians' pains are ongoing (2.1-7; cf. 7.5-16).<sup>645</sup> Following Vegge and Olson, I suggest that Paul is embellishing his optimism regarding the community to better pursue reconciliation.<sup>646</sup> However, if this project is to re-

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<sup>644</sup> I translate χωρέω in light of 6.11-13 given that it conveys openness, a lack of restriction (e.g. Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 303; Barnett, *Corinthians*, 358).

<sup>645</sup> See sec. III of Ch. 2.

<sup>646</sup> See sec. III.i of Ch. 2.

evaluate how Paul's argument is a 'word on target' for the Corinthians, I need to move beyond the relational circumstances and analyze what the apostle actually says to the community.<sup>647</sup> This is not a strong tendency in the existing literature, which is dominated by questions concerning Paul's motive and the circumstances behind the text. Thrall characteristically glosses Paul's praise of the community as 'politic' for the impending collection.<sup>648</sup> For those more focused on the question of reconciliation, the apparent end of the Corinthians' pain (v. 9-10) and the resolution of conflict (v. 16) is paramount.<sup>649</sup> But in light of my conclusion concerning the situation, one must consider the text's *constructive function* amidst conflict, where Paul continues to build his strength in weakness theology and observes more than a reversal of fortune in Corinth. In 7.5-16, Paul records the transformative progress of the paradox amongst the Corinthians. This is initially signalled by a return to the 'heart' theme (v. 3)—the site of transformation in 6.11-13—and Paul's comfort (v. 4), which was last seen in conjunction with the affliction in Asia (1.3-11).

Perhaps the most constructive analysis of 2 Corinthians 7 is Kaplan's, which links Paul's comfort (v. 4) to his discussion of pain (v. 5-13) and suggests that Second Isaiah and Lamentations serve as key sources for this Pauline interplay.<sup>650</sup> Kaplan refers to comfort and pain as 'apocalyptic antinomies', but nonetheless gives a straightforward reading: 'Paul speaks words of comfort to the Corinthians in the midst of a world consumed by affliction and suffering'.<sup>651</sup> Kaplan fails to consider the nature of comfort during the affliction in Asia, where Paul found death before experiencing life (1.8-11). The apostle places himself in a similar position in 2 Corinthians 7, noting that his anticipation of the painful letter led

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<sup>647</sup> Beker, *Triumph*, 24.

<sup>648</sup> Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:487. Also see e.g. Witherington, *Corinthians*, 410 and Plummer, *Corinthians*, 228-229.

<sup>649</sup> E.g. Barnett, *Corinthians*, 371-382; Barrett, *Corinthians* 206-207; Harris, *Corinthians*, 522.

<sup>650</sup> Jonathan Kaplan, 'Comfort, O Comfort, Corinth: Grief and Comfort in 2 Corinthians 7:5-13a', *HTR* 104, no. 4 (October 2011): 433-45 [438-445].

<sup>651</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.



to being 'afflicted in every way [ἐν παντὶ θλιβόμενοι]' and feeling 'disputes without and fears within [ἔξωθεν μάχαι, ἔσωθεν φόβοι]' (v. 5). According to Barrett, this latter comment highlights Paul's struggle with the state of affairs in Corinth.<sup>652</sup> Paul is eventually consoled by the appearance of Titus and his report on the punishment of the offender, which is credited to the 'God who comforts [παρακαλέω] the downcast [ταπεινοί]' (v. 6). This suggests that Paul is reflecting on a past experience of polarized weakness (cf. 1.8-9). He is afflicted 'in every way'—to the point that he embodies 'the downcast'—and his only relief comes from the God who comforts amidst weakness (cf. 1.3-7).

The final piece of evidence to suggest that Paul's narrative is following patterns consistent with other paradoxical passages is the retrospective statement: 'I am overjoyed [ὕπερπερισσεύομαι τῇ χαρᾷ] in all our affliction [πάσῃ τῇ θλίψει ἡμῶν]' (v. 4). This verse connects the pain-ridden conflict between Paul and Corinth to the concept of *θλίψις*.<sup>653</sup> More importantly, it suggests that two opposites—joy and affliction—can co-exist. In fact, Paul relates them with the preposition ἐπί, suggesting that joy does not come *after* affliction; instead, it blossoms in the midst of it.<sup>654</sup> This means that Paul has undergone a paradox that transforms his view of the conflict with Corinth. By the coming of Titus, God creates joy that is simultaneously engulfed in turmoil. But the more stunning development is that God does not mediate comfort through Paul to the Corinthians. The comfort arrives with the good news from Corinth! The transformative work of God, to create what is not and to bind together what is opposed, has taken root in the community and produced fruit. This is confirmed by Paul's statement that he wishes 'to die together [συναποθνήσκω] and

<sup>652</sup> Barrett, *Corinthians*, 207. Also see Furnish, *Corinthians*, 394.

<sup>653</sup> I understand Paul's reference to his mutual affliction with Corinth to be all-encompassing and thus to include the community's pains. See e.g. Harris, *Corinthians*, 520-21 and Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:485. For more discussion of the relationships between Paul's suffering terms, see sec. IV.i of Ch. 2.

<sup>654</sup> I suggest the preposition is being used in a temporal sense—i.e. 'upon being afflicted, I am overjoyed'. So Harris, *Corinthians*, 521 and Martin, *Corinthians*, 222.

to live together [σὺζῶω]' with the Corinthians (v. 3). Previously, it has only been the apostle who is dying *and* living (cf. 1.3-11; 4.7-15). But here the community has joined this paradoxical pattern, and thus becomes more amenable to Paul despite their pains.

This reading of the first verses of 2 Corinthians 7 suggests a narrative sub-structure that interpreters generally fail to observe.<sup>655</sup> As mentioned above, rather than having God comfort the Corinthians through Paul (cf. 1.3-7), the Corinthians' role is reversed so that *they* relay God's comfort *to Paul* (7.1-7). This is significant because Paul is found throughout the material trying to persuade the Corinthians to reconcile with him. He asks them to pray for him (1.11), he defends himself (3.1-3; 6.3-4), and he suggests that the Corinthians' hearts are closed (6.11-13). But one must not allow these efforts to muddle the reality that Paul's remarks in 7.1-7 reveal a subtle mutuality which has developed in Corinth, where the community holds a small share in Christ's outward-focused vulnerability. Christ redeems both Paul's and the Corinthians' vulnerabilities (e.g. 13.4), enabling Paul to serve the Corinthians (e.g. 1.3-7), the Corinthians to serve Paul (e.g. 7.1-7), and thus revealing a paradox with compounded outward momentum. The implication is that interpreters who are confused by Paul's tone in this passage, and thus posit partitions to explain Paul's direct and comforting address, have failed to understand his argument in preceding passages: he has not simply defended himself or explained his ministry. Instead, he speaks directly to Corinth (1.6-8; 1.11; 4.15; 6.1; 6.12-13) and, when he speaks indirectly, he models how Christ changes their struggle with pains (1.8-10; 4.7; 6.3-10). When he finally becomes more direct in 7.5-16, this should hardly be a surprise. All that remains to be seen is how exactly the paradox has transformed the community.

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<sup>655</sup> Cf. Ma. Marilou S. Ibita, 'Mending a Broken Relationship: The Social Relations and the Symbolic Universe of 2 Corinthians 1-7', in *Theologizing in the Corinthian Conflict*, eds. Reimund Bieringer et al., BTS 16 (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 43-68; Stegman, *Corinthians*, 176-177; Kaplan, 'Comfort', 433-438; Thrall, *Corinthians*, I:486-491.

*ii. Productive or Paralyzing Pain? A Community Pulled in Two Directions (v. 9-13)*

Beginning in v. 7b, Paul details what has happened in Corinth since the community received the painful letter. He notes his regret concerning this document, which faded as he learned of the effect that it had within the community (v. 9). Of course, this is not the only impact that it had (cf. 2.1-7). But the letter nonetheless produced 'longing [ἐπιπόθησις]', 'mourning [ὀδυρμός]' and 'zeal [ζήλος]' for Paul (v. 7). He goes on to explain that the community experienced a kind of pain that 'led to repentance' (v. 9a) and, as such, is truly a 'godly pain [ἐλυπήθητε...κατὰ θεόν]' that works 'without regret [ἀμεταμέλητος]' (v. 9b). After contrasting this pain with the 'worldly pain' (v. 10), Paul notes the new attitudes found in Corinth: eagerness (σπουδή), indignation (ἀγανάκτησις), zeal (ζήλος), and the punishment of the offender (ἐκδίκησις) (v. 11).<sup>656</sup> So Paul declares the community innocent with respect to the offender, concluding that he is comforted by their loyalty (v. 13).<sup>657</sup>

The most interesting feature of these verses is the manner in which Paul describes the community's pain: it is a 'godly pain' that leads to 'repentance' (v. 9-10). Interpreters are generally focused on the *result* of the godly pain rather than *how* it is achieved.<sup>658</sup> The exception is Welborn, who, as discussed earlier, argues that Paul uses his 'pathetic proofs' to encourage the Corinthians to embody 'Christ-like passions' as opposed to 'all-too-human emotions'.<sup>659</sup> However, like the rest of the field, Welborn fails to consider this transformation with respect to the summit of the material—the strength in weakness paradox. This is significant given that the godly pain's association with repentance is a

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<sup>656</sup> This thesis does not consider the material in 2 Cor. 8-9 despite connections with 7.5-16, not least being the term σπουδή (8.7, 8, 16). Although it would be interesting to trace how the transformative nature of the strength in weakness paradox relates to Corinth's ability to participate in the collection, the material in chs. 8-9 is topically distinct and contains little relating to Paul's or the Corinthians' weakness. My key research goal is to trace how the apostle's strength in weakness argument responds to the community's pains (2.1-7; 7.5-16), thus necessitating a clear focus on only the most relevant texts (e.g. 1.3-11; 4.7-15; 6.3-13).

<sup>657</sup> See sec. III.i of Ch. 2 for a discussion on why the discourse of 7.5-16 is limited to this issue.

<sup>658</sup> See p. 195-96 above.

<sup>659</sup> Welborn, 'Emotions', 59. Also see Welborn, 'Pain', 547-552.

surprising reality that places opposite experiences in a particular sequence. The Corinthians are pained (v. 9), but they are also saved and without regret (v. 10). Their godly pain even produces positive qualities like longing, eagerness, and zeal (v. 11). This suggests that the pain and its fruits are a proto-paradox.<sup>660</sup> In other words, the Corinthians' turnaround is produced by an experience of strength in weakness. Similar to 6.3-13, God has redeemed the pains within the community and paradoxically enabled them to produce good fruit. By overlooking the connection between the paradox and transformation, interpreters miss one of Paul's most explicit recognitions that the paradox creates tangible change in Corinth. This is highlighted by Paul's use of ἐργάζομαι (v. 10a) and κατεργάζομαι (v. 10b)—the godly pain is a dynamic, productive reality.<sup>661</sup> It brings the humility necessary to heed Paul and rebuke the offender without eclipsing the strength required to complete the act (v. 11).

An additional dimension to the Corinthians' godly pain is the dichotomy that it forms with the worldly pain, which leads to death (θάνατος) (v. 10b). In light of the Corinthians' battle with bitterness, heartbreak, and despair (2.1-7)—in distinction to their godly sense of remorse (7.5-16)—it seems fairly certain that this worldly pain is representative of their struggles. This is confirmed by Paul's use of θάνατος to describe the polarity of strength or weakness (1.9) which, in Corinth, is produced by the community's struggle with pains.<sup>662</sup> Welborn suggests that the eschatological contrast between godly and worldly pain exists because 'the passions of Christ...partitioned pain'.<sup>663</sup> He continues, 'The pain of this world remained, and, as always, led through depression to death (7.10). But the suffering of Christ had disclosed a pain that was in accordance with God's will, a pain that

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<sup>660</sup> The sense of sequence here prevents the paradoxical formulation from being further developed.

<sup>661</sup> For the meaning of these terms and their connection to tangible creative acts, see e.g. Rom. 2.10; 1 Cor. 4.12; Phil 2.12; Rom. 7.20.

<sup>662</sup> See sec. IV.ii of Ch. 2.

<sup>663</sup> Welborn, 'Pain', 570.

led through repentance to salvation.<sup>664</sup> Paul does not explicitly mention Christ here, but Welborn is right to see his death and resurrection as formative for the apostle's understanding of godly pain (e.g. 13.4; 1.8-11). The most important observation for Paul, however, is that the Corinthians' godly pain is productive whereas the worldly grief is not. This is where the pragmatic difference between God and humanity re-emerges: where the world withers and dies, God creates life, repentance, and salvation. In particular, Paul lists a variety of effects stemming from the godly grief that do not occur elsewhere in 2 Corinthians. The paradox has yet to produce full reconciliation (6.11-13), hope (1.11), or love (12.15) in Corinth; but it has produced longing, zeal, eagerness, and the punishment of the offender (7.11). In this sense, the Corinthians are a community pulled in two directions. This explains why Paul praises the Corinthians but asks them to open their hearts: they have already had an experience of strength in weakness, though it has yet to take root in the most important areas of their communal life.<sup>665</sup>

## VI. Conclusion

This chapter contains two analyses concerning 2 Corinthians 6-7: 1) a consideration of Paul's changing tone and 2) an exegesis of 6.1-13 and parts of ch. 7, with a focus on the paradoxes of 6.8b-10 and their connection to reconciliation in v. 11-13. In the former, I trace Paul's tone from the beginning of the material to discover that he frequently observes two sides to the community within fragments where the situation is supposedly straightforward: the Corinthians suffer (1.6-7) yet extract overbearing punishment (2.7); they need to be told that their pains dissolve at the *eschaton* (5.1-5), but they are involved

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<sup>664</sup> Ibid.

<sup>665</sup> One might wonder what gave rise to this experience of the paradox in Corinth when Paul seems to spend much of 2 Corinthians asking the community to be open to such realities. One possibility might be that the community, burdened by the pain of Paul's previous visit and letter, is refreshed by Titus's visit (7.6) and responds better to him (7.13).

with those who boast in outward appearance (5.12). This suggests that the situation(s) envisioned by partition and unity theories are too simple. The Corinthians are *both* strong and weak—and oscillating between the two—so Paul counters their bipolar nature by confronting their strengths and consoling their weaknesses. This theory is bolstered by what I call the apostle's 'identification verses', where he identifies the Corinthians' position of strength or weakness which provokes a change in his tone (e.g. 1.13, 3.1, 5.12).

But Paul's larger solution to the Corinthians' polarity of strength *or* weakness is to form a paradox of strength *in* weakness. This strategy begins to develop before 6.1-13, where the apostle details how reconciliation between God and humanity is achieved *via* Christ's paradoxical death (5.21). The apostle then calls for reconciliation with God (6.1a), suggesting that when he calls the Corinthians to directly reconcile with him (6.11-13), he will note a paradox that helps to accomplish this end. For the time being, the apostle likens the Corinthians' obstinacy to receiving the 'grace of God' in vain (v. 1b). As Christ's ambassador (5.20), Paul uses his hardship catalogue (6.4b-10) to demonstrate what happens when one receives God's grace. Paul lists vices and virtues that climax with a series of paradoxes (v. 8b-10) before beginning a call for reconciliation (v. 11-13).

Most interpreters believe that Paul's call for reconciliation (v. 11-13) is a request for reciprocity or is predicated upon Paul's apostolic credentials, but his reference to paradoxes (v. 8b-10) and the paradox-reconciliation pattern established above suggest that an experience of the paradoxes themselves would allow the Corinthians to reconcile. This is important because the community is restricted in their affections toward Paul (6.12)—a reference to their deep-seated pains (2.1-7)—so Paul envisions the strength in weakness paradox redeeming the Corinthians' pains by giving them a productive function in the fight for reconciliation: the paradox enables the community's strengths and weaknesses to co-

exist (without merely competing against one another) and thus to supply the humility and initiative necessary to love the apostle Paul. This is accomplished through the paradoxical structure of Paul's argument, which allows the opposites of strength and weakness to mutually qualify one another and thus create humility without self-loathing and initiative without self-centered pride. In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul considers the early returns of the paradox in Corinth. He notes that he is comforted (7.4), but it is not to comfort the Corinthians (1.3-7); rather, the Corinthians are comforting him through the return of Titus (7.6)! This suggests that the paradox has begun to take root in Corinth, which is confirmed by Paul's description of the godly grief leading to positive attitudes in Corinth. Crucially, it 'produces' eagerness, longing and zeal (7.11), making for Paul's clearest statement yet that the paradox transforms the community's attitudes and behaviours.

Given all of the above, especially Paul's focus on redeeming the Corinthians' pains, it seems that the apologetic paradigm is once again overlooking the central tenets of Paul's argument. Even when the apostle is seemingly self-focused (6.4b-10), he is fashioning experiences that are meant to speak into the Corinthians' own struggles with weakness. This will be important to keep in mind in the following chapter, which considers what is widely held to be the height of Paul's apology—2 Corinthians 10-13—and the competing visions of the paradox that have largely been developed by German scholarship. Can my thesis concerning the transformative function of strength in weakness be defended in the climax of 2 Corinthians? And if so, how might this change prevailing readings of this supposedly harsh, unrestrained material?





## Chapter 5

### A Co-inherent Crescendo: Distinguishing the Paradox's Transformative Function

#### I. Introduction to 2 Corinthians 10-13

During their debate on the nature of human freedom, Martin Luther and Erasmus of Rotterdam disagreed on many things, including the use of paradox. Luther did not see any contradiction in viewing the will as totally dependent upon God's grace.<sup>666</sup> But Erasmus, advocating a more libertarian view, challenged Luther: 'What can be more useless than to publish this paradox to the world?'<sup>667</sup> Luther responded, 'But if you think these paradoxes are words of God, how can you keep your countenance, where is your shame...when you say that nothing more useless could be proclaimed than the Word of God? Naturally, your Creator must learn from you his creature what is useful or useless to preach!'<sup>668</sup>

I begin with this historical anecdote because it reflects a crucial dynamic in the discussion on 2 Corinthians 10-13. Like Erasmus, many modern interpreters suggest that the Pauline experience of strength in weakness is incomprehensible—even useless—until one resolves it and discovers what Paul really meant.<sup>669</sup> For those who do not go so far, the paradox is often left undeveloped or it is constructed in a manner that shows little regard for its logical structure.<sup>670</sup> As a result, the most sophisticated chapters of an otherwise paradoxical letter are commonly interpreted *without paradox*. This is especially surprising given that Paul's experience of strength in weakness is the primary theological motif in his response to the Corinthians (e.g. 1.8-11; 4.7-15; 6.1-13). The paradox has also appeared

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<sup>666</sup> LW 33:241-245, 277-287 (*The Bondage of the Will*).

<sup>667</sup> LB IX 1217D-F. Also see CWE: 76:12-13 (*The Freedom of the Will*).

<sup>668</sup> LW 33:59.

<sup>669</sup> E.g. Heckel, *Kraft*, 324; Aejmelaeus, *Schwachheit*, 284; Lambrecht, 'Sterkte', 274-75.

<sup>670</sup> See sec. I of Ch. 1. I also documented this trend in the preceding chapters, see esp. sec. VII.i-iii of Ch. 3.

elsewhere as the opposite of useless: it furnishes Paul with a transformative word for the community that enables, among other things, reconciliation between the two parties.<sup>671</sup>

The Erasmian approach to strength in weakness—that is, the rejection (principled or otherwise) of the paradox—is especially contentious given that 2 Corinthians 10-13 contains the climax of Paul's strength in weakness argument in 12.7-10.<sup>672</sup> The apostle builds to this moment as his subtle barbs and generally consolatory approach give way to bombastic tirades (e.g. 10.11-12; 11.1-6). He explicitly addresses his opponents, the 'super-apostles [ὑπερλίαν ἀποστόλοι]' (11.5), but this shift in approach does not alter the topic matter. The paradox appears to flourish in some of Paul's most memorable statements. He struggles with 'the thorn in the flesh [σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί]' (v. 7) before receiving the *Herrnwort*: 'ἄρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου, ἡ γὰρ δύναμις ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελεῖται' (v. 9). This statement enables Paul to be content with weaknesses (v. 10a) and to proclaim, 'ὅταν γὰρ ἀσθενῶ, τότε δυνατός εἰμι' (v. 10b).

Despite the theological nature of chs. 10-13, especially 12.7-10, the majority of the literature on these passages is focused on historical issues and questions of form. The identity of the opponents (10.10), the intellectual antecedents to the 'Fool's Speech' (11.23-12.11), and the background to the ascent to paradise (12.1-5) dominate the conversation.<sup>673</sup> Although I will not use Luther's *a priori* defense above, I will contend—like Luther—that Paul's argument in 2 Corinthians 10-13 is only fully comprehended when its paradoxes are recognized as meaningful centrepieces. By overlooking the argument's theological dimensions, scholars have failed to perceive the transformative nature of the paradox and how several features in 12.1-10—Paul's thorn, visions, and boasting—highlight his

<sup>671</sup> See especially my analysis of 2 Corinthians 6.11-13 in sec. V of Ch. 4.

<sup>672</sup> This is a widely held view, see e.g. Harris, *Corinthians*, 827 and Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 587.

<sup>673</sup> Consider the sources classified under 'Opponents', 'Paradise' and 'Fool's Speech' in Reimund Bieringer et al., eds., *2 Corinthians: A Bibliography*, BTS 5 (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 183; 209-215. There are no sources listed on 'Paradox', and the closest category—'Suffering'—is not nearly as long (246-248).

paradoxical word for the Corinthians. Paul contends that through experiences of strength in weakness, his knowledge, emotions, and behaviour are so thoroughly changed that if the Corinthians were to undergo the same transformation, they would be liberated from their polarity of strength or weakness and enabled to reconcile with him. In this sense, Erasmus' objection to paradox, and the dominant modern approach to 2 Corinthians 10-13, become deeply ironic: paradox is the most *useful* theological framework for a community alternating between pride and despair. Such a proposal, if proven true, would also offer a significant rebuttal to the apologetic research paradigm, which draws some of its greatest support from reading 2 Corinthians 10-13 as a thoroughgoing apology. But before I can defend these hypotheses, I introduce some of the key variables that frame Paul's remarks.

## II. A Brief Survey of Interpretive Issues in 2 Corinthians 10-13

### *i. Paul's Tone: The Work of a Psychopath or a Psychopathologist? (2 Cor. 10-11)*

Many interpreters believe that the literary break at 10.1—"I, Paul, myself entreat you..."—signals a shift to a confrontational, defensive tone that defines 2 Corinthians 10-13.<sup>674</sup> Paul is about to become 'forceful'<sup>675</sup> and 'minatory', which is evident in the insults (10.12b; 11.3) and biting sarcasm (11.7; 11.19) directed toward the Corinthians.<sup>676</sup> The combination of this change in tone and the aforementioned break are commonly explained by one of two major partition theories: 1) 2 Corinthians 10-13 is the painful letter (cf. 2.1-7) that was later attached to the other Corinthian material, or 2) it is a later apologetic that was written once the opponents became more prominent within the community.<sup>677</sup> In both proposals, a dramatic change in circumstance occurs between 2 Corinthians 1-9 and 10-13.

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<sup>674</sup> See e.g. Jan Lambrecht, 'Paul's Appeal and the Obedience to Christ: The Line of Thought in 2 Corinthians 10,1-6', *Bib 77* (1996): 398-416 [398]; Pickett, *Cross*, 160-161; Roetzel, 'War', 78-79.

<sup>675</sup> Barrett, *Corinthians*, 245.

<sup>676</sup> Plummer, *Corinthians*, 273.

<sup>677</sup> See sec. IV.iii of Ch. 2.

Even unity theories engage this apparent change, suggesting that it signifies a pause in the writing or the trouble of a sleepless night.<sup>678</sup> But such explanations have been heavily criticized. Georgi famously states that Paul's tonal change is so dramatic that if it were an intentional switch in a unified letter, '[Paul's] psyche would... surely be a case for psychopathology'.<sup>679</sup>

Georgi's comment is a helpful reminder that the break at 10.1 is an interpretive staple dating back to Semler, who used this quandary to propose the first partition theory in modern studies of 2 Corinthians.<sup>680</sup> But the conclusions surrounding 10.1 are not unquestionable: they are aided, even dependent upon, a strong predisposition to explaining significant shifts in tone as different documents addressing a new situation.<sup>681</sup> On the contrary, I have been arguing that Paul's tone varies far more than what has been accounted for by partition theorists. Crucially, he ties his changes in tone to the Corinthians' mindset, thus suggesting that partitionists wrongly attribute these changes to different situations when they are the result of a complex, multi-faceted community.<sup>682</sup> To what degree (or not) might this error have also been committed regarding the material following 10.1?

The first contentious piece of evidence is the basis for Paul's entreaty to the Corinthians in 10.1: the 'meekness [πραΰτης] and gentleness [ἐπιείκεια] of Christ'. While Paul is certainly changing the topic matter—the collection now lies in the background (e.g. 8.1-9.15)—these concepts are not foreign (cf. 1.3-7; 7.5-16). The irony is that they introduce chapters that are typically considered anything but meek and gentle. Leivestad comments: 'An appeal to "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" is hardly in keeping with

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<sup>678</sup> Ibid.

<sup>679</sup> Georgi, *Opponents*, 10.

<sup>680</sup> For the history of 2 Corinthians partition theories, see Betz, *Corinthians*, 3-36.

<sup>681</sup> This is evident in several works on 2 Corinthians that take the methodology of the documentary hypothesis for granted: see e.g. Bornkamm, 'Origin', 258 and Schmithals, *Gnosticism*, 96.

<sup>682</sup> See sec. IV.iii.c of Ch. 2.

the harsh and forthright tone of the following argument, in which the apostle asserts his authority and right to show no lenience.<sup>683</sup> This apparent contradiction is highlighted by Paul's exhortative use of παρακαλέω (v. 1). It is not a particularly strong term, and it is otherwise used in the letter's introduction to signal the comfort of God in Paul's paradoxical rescue (1.3-11).<sup>684</sup>

Despite these observations, some interpreters defend the thoroughly confrontational nature of Paul's tone in 2 Corinthians 10-13 by suggesting that the apostle is not expressing the kindness of the Lord in 10.1, but his *kenōsis*.<sup>685</sup> This suggests that Paul's reference to meekness and gentleness prepares the reader for his defence, where he shows the Corinthians that he possesses strength even in the most dire of weaknesses. But such conclusions fail to recall that the Corinthians experienced their own *kenōsis* of sorts—the pains created by Paul's previous letter (2.1-7)—which could imply that the apostle's appeal possesses a consolatory dimension. Here Paul associates himself not with the victorious Christ (2.14), the bold Christ (2.17), the sufficient Christ (3.14), or the judgment seat of Christ (5.10); instead, he refers to the meek and gentle Christ for a community that longs for this kind of Saviour. The connection between the Corinthian community's situation and Paul's tone becomes clearer as he moves forward. He begins the following verse by saying, 'I beg [δέομαι] of you', and then explains that he does not want to 'show boldness [θαρσέω]' toward the community (v. 2). This is significant because it implies that the apostle's tone can change according to the various dimensions of the community's behaviour and not necessarily as a result of a new situation. Bultmann likewise comments,

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<sup>683</sup> Ragnar Leivestad, 'The Meekness and Gentleness of Christ' II Cor. X. 1,' *NT S* 12, no. 2 (January 1966): 156–64 [156].

<sup>684</sup> See sec. II of Ch. 3.

<sup>685</sup> See the overview in Lambrecht, 'Appeal', 413.

'Paul is stating in no uncertain terms that it is up to you whether or not the connection between us shall be governed by *πραΰτητος* and *ἐπιεικείας*'.<sup>686</sup>

As Paul's discourse progresses, his tone becomes more varied. He defiantly states that he does not feel inferior to the Corinthians (v. 7), although he is sobered by the accusations made against him (v. 10). But Paul is not the only victim here. He clearly had an imposing presence upon the community: he admits that his letters may be 'frightening [*ἐκφοβέω*]' the Corinthians (v. 9, cf. 7.11). This is an overlooked reference to the community's struggles, and probably the apostle's painful letter—the only incident that clearly frightened the Corinthians. Regardless, this reference continues to challenge the idea that the community is simply in rebellion mode and that Paul has become confrontational in response. He certainly attacks the community at times (e.g. v. 6, 12), but he is also aware of their frailties and addresses those too (v. 1-2, 9). Most importantly, this is not due to a new situation: Paul again identifies his use of multiple rhetorical strategies by claiming that his authority is for 'building up [*οικοδομή*]' and not 'destroying [*καθαίρεσις*]' although he engages 'a little too much [*περισσότερόν τι*]' in 'boasting [*καυχάομαι*]' (v. 8). The implication is that he is erring on the side of confronting the Corinthian boast with some boasting of his own (cf. 11.30-33). Consequently, Paul's strategy appears to be a continuation of what Glad calls his Epicurean 'adaptation' model in 1 Corinthians, which is developed 'because of the diversity of humans and variation in the human condition' (e.g. 1 Cor. 8.1-13; 9.19-23).<sup>687</sup> Like Philodemus before him, Paul is 'gentle towards the weak but more forceful...in his guidance of the recalcitrant and stubborn students'.<sup>688</sup> All that has changed since 1 Corinthians is that the community now

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<sup>686</sup> Bultmann, *Corinthians*, 183.

<sup>687</sup> Clarence E. Glad, *Paul and Philodemus: Adaptability in Epicurean and Early Christian Psychagogy*, NovTSup 81 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 44.

<sup>688</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

oscillates between these two kinds of existence and thus requires the constant alternation of Paul's tone.

This Pauline pattern of changing the tone to better address the complexities of the Corinthian community continues through the remainder of chs. 10-11. After recognizing his potentially damaging impact on the community (v. 9), Paul recites their claims against him and threatens that he can be as strong in person as in his letters (v. 11). He makes a direct attack on his opponents and asserts that they are 'without understanding [οὐ συνιᾶσιν]' (v. 12). But in the following paragraph, he reminds the Corinthians of his care: he was the first to bring the 'gospel of Christ' to them (v. 14) and he hopes that their 'faith' will 'increase' (v. 15). These hardly appear to be the confessions of a raging apostle! The clearest piece of evidence that Paul is altering his tone to suit the Corinthians' oscillations between strength and weakness is found in 11.19-20. The community may think it is 'wise [φρόνιμος]', but they are bearing with 'fools [ἄφρονες]' (v. 19). A mysterious 'someone [τις]' is 'enslaving [καταδουλόω]' them, 'devouring [κατεσθίω]' them, and 'striking [δέρω]' them 'in the face [εἰς πρόσωπον]' (v. 20). Interpreters agree that this 'someone' refers to the opponents who infiltrated the community.<sup>689</sup> Their apparent control over the Corinthians re-affirms my decision to view Paul's remarks in 2 Corinthians 10-13 as a communal address rather than an engagement with the opponents alone.<sup>690</sup> More importantly, the dynamic created by the opponents in Corinth suggests that even as the community claims strength, they are actually in a position of weakness from Paul's perspective.

It is worth recalling that there is a probable connection between the Corinthians' ongoing pains and experiences of shame.<sup>691</sup> Within a community that prizes self-

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<sup>689</sup> See e.g. Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:716 and Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 422-23.

<sup>690</sup> See sec. IV.ii of Ch. 2. For further discussion, see p. 213-17 below.

<sup>691</sup> See sec. IV.ii of Ch. 2.

commendation and good appearance (e.g. 3.1-3; 10.10), it would have been shameful to be pained by a weak apostle (2.1-7). Barton illuminates the complexities of the Corinthian community when she refers to the 'spiral of shame' which can engulf a community and cause them to vigorously pursue their vindication.<sup>692</sup> She rightly notes that it is often lowly and defenceless individuals who zealously protect their honour.<sup>693</sup> But interpreters generally seem unaware of such dynamics in 11.20.<sup>694</sup> In fact, Barnett suggests that this verse is meant to challenge the actions of the Corinthian opponents.<sup>695</sup> He fails to see that Paul has just laid his finger upon the open wound of the community: the Corinthians are willing to be abused by the super-apostles because they *already* feel abused by Paul. What is a little more shame for a community who longs for even the smallest sense of victory? In this sense, the typical approach to 2 Corinthians 10-13 rightly perceives a more hostile community, and thus a more confrontational Paul. But this approach fails to note the cause of the community's change in character since 1 Corinthians—their pain and shame—and in doing so, it has lost sight of why Paul varies his tone so much. The community is willing to be put in a dishonorable position if it means they can seek revenge against Paul on the coattails of the opponents' claims to strength. So Paul becomes more confrontational (e.g. 10.11; 11.2; 13.5) to counter the claims of the opponents, but he continually reverts to his more consoling tone (e.g. 10.1; 10.14; 11.11) in an effort to address the shame that festers beneath the surface of the Corinthian rebellion. The mysterious changes in Paul's tone need not be explained by entirely new situations; instead, they may be viewed as the result of an unstable, even bipolar, community.

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<sup>692</sup> Barton, *Honor*, 255.

<sup>693</sup> *Ibid.*, 12; 254.

<sup>694</sup> See e.g. Barrett, *Corinthians*, 291-91 and Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:716-18.

<sup>695</sup> Barnett, *Corinthians*, 533.



The significance of the above observations is two-fold. First, the prevailing interpretation of Paul's tone in 2 Corinthians 10-13 is not sufficiently flexible to incorporate the changes in his tone (e.g. 10.1-2; 4-6; 9; 12). This is especially evident at the literary break in 10.1, where Paul does not become immediately incendiary. In fact, it makes more sense to conclude that his attack on the Corinthians begins in 10.4, as opposed to 10.1, given his invocation of the 'meekness and gentleness of Christ'. Second, Paul's tonal changes—moving back and forth between confrontation and consolation—place the Corinthian accusations in 10.10 on a wider spectrum. These insults are typically the reference point for the interpretation of Paul's strength in weakness in 12.9-10, where they are viewed as indicative of a rebellious community.<sup>696</sup> But such rebellion is mixed with a different, even contradictory, dynamic: the Corinthians' weakness. Paul consistently caters to it (e.g. 10.1; 9; 10a; 14), and even identifies its complexities in 11.20. In their quest to be strong, the Corinthians have become weak. Paul's change in tone represents not a change in *situation*, but a two-sided *tactic* that matches the community's movements between strength and weakness.

When combined with the material previously marshalled in favour of my proposal, it is evident that the outline of a new integrity theory has been born. Although so much more would need to be considered to fully defend my position—not least being a fuller engagement with the literary breaks of 2 Corinthians (e.g. 2.14; 7.5)—one must recall that my explanation has focused upon the primary issue of the debate: Paul's changing tone.<sup>697</sup> I have also been seeking only the *least implausible* solution to the integrity problem and, in

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<sup>696</sup> E.g. Betz, *Sokratische*, 44-69; Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:830; Bartsch, 'Weak', 52; Scott B. Andrews, 'Too Weak Not to Lead: The Form and Function of 2 Cor 11.23b-33', *NTS* 41, no. 2 (April 1995): 263-76 [273-276]. To be fair, Schmeller, *Korinther*, II:145 and Jacob Jervell, 'Der Schwache Charismatiker', in *Rechtfertigung: Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann*, ed. Johannes Friedrich (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1976), 185-98 [191-194] emphasize that Paul's thorn (12.7-10) is 'only one aspect' of the weaknesses bothering the community (10.10).

<sup>697</sup> See sec. IV.iii of Ch. 2.

light of my theory's ability to explain Paul's shifts in tone without positing documents for which there is no external evidence, it seems that I have met this standard. In fact, by reading 2 Corinthians in relation to the community's pain, which renders them strong and weak, one also avoids the errors of unity theories by engaging tonal shifts and even offering further evidence of such shifts. As a result, the very thing which was impossible to Georgi—a unity theory that explains Paul's changes in tone—is precisely what is suggested above, based not upon a sleepless night or a change of occasion; rather, it stems from Paul's strategy for addressing a community that is more complex than that envisioned by Georgi. Far from a psychopath, Paul fills the role of the psychopathologist and the Corinthians are his patients. This prepares the reader for Paul's forthcoming statement: 'Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending [ἀπολογέομαι] ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding [οἰκοδομή], beloved' (12.19). It seems that there is an underlying pastoral intent running through these chapters which eludes interpreters. But before I expand on this, I must complete the survey of issues relating to 2 Corinthians 10-13.

## *ii. The 'Super-Apostles'*

A key variable for the interpretation of 2 Corinthians 10-13 is Paul's engagement with the opponents. He refers to them as 'super-apostles [ὑπερλίαν ἀποστόλοι]' (11.5), and the fact that they are mentioned in 10.7-12 with respect to the Corinthian accusations against Paul suggests that this group has been influential in the community. Paul is responding to the challenge that he is inferior in speech (v. 10b; 11.6; 11.12-15), appearance (v. 10b) and, above all, that he has an inferior message about Jesus (cf. 11.4). However, I previously suggested that the opponents are one of several influences on the community, rather than the main party for Paul to address in 2 Corinthians 10-13. This

claim is examined more below. For the moment, the pressing question is: who are the opponents?

The first category of proposals suggests that the opponents were Judaizers who either insist on the importance of the Law, or attack the nature of Paul's apostolic authority, or possibly do the latter as a result of the former.<sup>698</sup> Plummer cites Paul's reference to 'ministers of righteousness' (11.15) as evidence that the opponents were zealous Jews whereas Käsemann points to the 'super-apostles' designation as a sign that they hailed from Jerusalem and claimed superior authority.<sup>699</sup> Another set of proposals suggest that the opponents claim a special spiritual status—either as Lütgert's 'Spirit-people'<sup>700</sup> (e.g. 11.4) or Georgi's 'divine men' (e.g. 11.22; 12.12).<sup>701</sup> A once prominent proposal is that the opponents were Gnostics given that Paul highlights the issue of *gnosis* in 11.4-6.<sup>702</sup> Others envision some combination of the above proposals.<sup>703</sup> For instance, Murphy-O'Connor suggests that there are two groups—the Judaizers and the Spirit-people—who amalgamated given a shared affinity for Moses (i.e. Philonic Judaism often praised Moses as the 'perfect wise man').<sup>704</sup>

The sheer quantity of studies on the opponents has likely obscured the fact that so much of this scholarship is educated guesswork. There is very little one can know with certainty, which is why the proposals that stress the theological claims of the opponents hold an advantage: Paul explicitly deems the opponents' message to be a different gospel

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<sup>698</sup> See the excellent overview of this position in Sumney, *Opponents*, 15-42.

<sup>699</sup> Plummer, *Corinthians*, 89; xl-xli; Ernst Käsemann, 'Legitimität des Apostels. Eine Untersuchung zu II Korinther 10-13', *ZNW* 41 (1942): 33-71 [41-2, 44-7].

<sup>700</sup> Wilhelm Lütgert, *Freiheitspredigt und Schwarmgeister in Korinth* (Göttingen: Bertelsmann, 1908), 49; 67-71. A similar conclusion is reached in Sumney, *Opponents*, 187-92.

<sup>701</sup> Georgi, *Opponents*, 41-60; 258-64.

<sup>702</sup> See esp. Schmithals, *Gnosticism*, 135-38. For more, see Sumney, *Opponents*, 43-48.

<sup>703</sup> See e.g. C. K. Barrett, 'Paul's Opponents in II Corinthians' *NTS* 17, no. 3 (April 1971): 233-54 [253-54] and Thrall, *Corinthians*, II: 940-42.

<sup>704</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 274-282.

(11.4), which is attributed to their Satanic servanthood (11.14). Even the language of weakness incited by the opponents against Paul (10.10) is challenged in a deeply theological manner (e.g. 1.8-11; 12.9), thus suggesting that it holds theological content for the opponents too. Otherwise, it is best to focus on what is common amongst the proposals. Using this approach, the opponents are insiders or outsiders who are associated with the community in some way. They focus on external matters (i.e. speech [10.10; 11.6], appearance [10.10], commendation [3.1-3; 10.12; 10.15]), but these are flashpoints for deeper, personal reservations about Paul (e.g. 11.5; 11.12). The opponents attack Paul's authority over the community and thus threaten the Corinthian community's life in Christ (e.g. 11.2-3; 13.5-6).

Some interpreters, particularly Hafemann and Thrall, would object that Paul is more concerned in 2 Corinthians 10-13 with defending himself.<sup>705</sup> They recognize that the opponents pose a threat to all of the Corinthians, but the community is extremely factionalized—some support the opponents and others do not (e.g. 2.6; 7.5-16; 13.21). On this reading, 2 Corinthians 10-13 is viewed as a discourse addressed largely, even exclusively, to the opponents and their Corinthian supporters. However, I previously established that the Corinthians' pain (λύπη) is ongoing and affected the whole community.<sup>706</sup> As a result, the conditions in Corinth are generally poor and favourable to further rebellion.<sup>707</sup> There are some who support the punishment of the offender and some who do not, but this is presented as a relatively minor issue (2.6). Paul distinguishes his opponents from others in Corinth (e.g. 10.2; 10.12; 11.12), although he typically proceeds to hold the whole community culpable for the opponents' claims (11.4-6; 12.11). This is

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<sup>705</sup> Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 391-92; Thrall, *Corinthians*, II: 598. Also see O'Collins 'Weakness', 534 and Dodd, *Paradigmatic*, 30.

<sup>706</sup> See sec. II-III of Ch. 2.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid.

reflected in the literature on 2 Corinthians 10-13, where interpreters emphasize the role of the opponents yet continually refer to 'the Corinthians' or 'the community'.<sup>708</sup> It is difficult to draw a hard boundary between the super-apostles and the Corinthians generally, and some interpreters should be faulted for trying to do so, even to the point of over interpreting the text. For instance, in the preamble to the Corinthian accusations (10.10a), the ὅτι...φησὶν is typically translated as 'for they say'—as though these claims come directly from a particular group.<sup>709</sup> But Paul uses the plural second person to refer to the whole community in v. 9 and the language of v. 10a suggests a general, proverbial rendering such as 'it is said', not least because the verb is in the singular.<sup>710</sup>

So the approach adopted in this chapter is to recognize that the community is factionalized and, crucially, there is a distinct group of opponents who receive special attention in 2 Corinthians 10-13. But as Paul addresses the opponents, he is addressing the community—the opponents are simply the leaders of the pack.<sup>711</sup> In fact, Paul never directly addresses the Corinthian opponents, choosing instead to refer to them in the third person and the community in the second person (e.g. 10.12-13; 11.5-6). This makes sense in the emerging view of the letter, where Paul is not having an exclusive dialogue with the opponents, but is actively ministering to the Corinthians' experience of weakness—one which saturated the community as a result of the apostle's previous visit and letter. Such experiences force the Corinthians to embrace the opponents (11.20), but this group is less the primary *audience* of 2 Corinthians 10-13 and more the key *influence* upon the Corinthians' pursuit of naked strength: their claims puff up the community when it desperately needs some sense of superiority. Therefore, one may take 2 Corinthians 10-13

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<sup>708</sup> E.g. Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 484; Harris, *Corinthians*, 699-700; Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 388-89.

<sup>709</sup> See e.g. the ESV and NRSV translations. Interpreters include Collins, *Corinthians*, 202 and Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 388.

<sup>710</sup> So Barrett, *Corinthians*, 260 and Harris, *Corinthians*, 698

<sup>711</sup> This is the view of Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 172 and Pickett, *Cross*, 164.

to be interested in the opponents yet cohering with my view that the primary problem in Corinth is a flagging devotion to Christ—expressed by the rejection of Paul—which is occurring not merely due to opponents but due to the community's broader polarity of strength or weakness.

### *iii. The Structure of 2 Corinthians 10-13 and the Role of the Fool's Speech*

Having clarified Paul's general approach in 2 Corinthians 10-13 and the role of the opponents, it remains to be seen how the apostle structures his argument. Interpreters are generally agreed that the first section of Paul's argument is 10.1-11, where the community's accusations are most prominent (i.e. v. 10).<sup>712</sup> After threatening the community that he is equally powerful in person (v. 11), Paul proceeds to distinguish between proper and improper forms of boasting (10.12-18). Forbes suggests that 10.12 most reveals what Paul disliked about Corinthian boasting: 'But when they measure [μετρέω] themselves by one another and compare [συγκρίνω] themselves with one another, they are without understanding [συνίημι]' (v. 12).<sup>713</sup> On the other hand, Paul 'boasts appropriately, according to the authority given him by the Lord and for the building up of the church.'<sup>714</sup> This leads to his well-known Fool's Speech—beginning in 11.1 and concluding in 12.11—which is an *inclusio* formed by the words ἄφροσύνη (11.1) and ἄφρων (12.11).<sup>715</sup> Upon demonstrating his foolishness by boasting in weakness (e.g. 11.21-29; 12.9b), Paul transitions in 12.12-21 to the conclusion of 13.1-10, where he challenges the community to prove their faith in Jesus (v. 5). This structure is largely reflected in Sundermann's rhetorical analysis: 1) Exordium (10.1-11); 2) Narration and proposition (10.12-18); 3) Argument (11.1-12.18;

<sup>712</sup> See e.g. Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 465 and Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:596.

<sup>713</sup> Christopher Forbes, 'Comparison, Self-Praise and Irony: Paul's Boasting and the Conventions of Hellenistic Rhetoric', *NTS* 32, no. 1 (January 1986): 1–30 [1].

<sup>714</sup> Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 486.

<sup>715</sup> For more discussion, including alternative views on the length of the Fool's Speech, see Jan Lambrecht, 'The Fool's Speech and Its Context: Paul's Particular Way of Arguing in 2 Cor 10-13', *Biblica* 82, no. 3 (2001): 305–24 [esp. 305-08].

Refutation [11.1-15]; Proof [11.16-12.18]); 4) Transfer (12.19-21); 5) Peroration (13.1-10).<sup>716</sup> What is common amongst the various structural analyses is the central role of the Fool's Speech in 2 Corinthians 10-13.<sup>717</sup>

One of the more detailed studies of the relationship between the Fool's Speech and its context is offered by Lambrecht, who suggests that Paul draws three 'rings' around this discourse: *paranesis* (10.1; 13.11); authority (10.2-18; 13.1-10); denial of inferiority (11.5-12; 12.11b-18).<sup>718</sup> These rings 'do not lead to foolish boasting', but in an 'essential way' they complete 'the portrait of a Paul who in his speech boasts foolishly and boasts paradoxically of weaknesses'.<sup>719</sup> While Lambrecht rightly emphasizes that the community's accusations (10.10) would influence Paul's decision to boast,<sup>720</sup> it would also be driven by the apostle's continued exposition of strength in weakness (e.g. 6.3-10; 12.7-10)—a claim that would appear truly foolish within the community's worldview. So Paul highlights how he 'will boast [καυχάομαι]' of the things that show his 'weakness [ἀσθένεια]' (11.30), even boasting in weakness itself (12.9b), to express how the paradox changes his values. In antiquity, boasting was often done to enhance one's honour by naming successes.<sup>721</sup> But Paul's boast is of an essentially different character, particularly in its self-effacing nature (e.g. 10.18; 11.11).

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<sup>716</sup> Hans-Georg Sundermann, *Der schwache Apostel und die Kraft der Rede: Eine rhetorische Analyse von 2 Kor 10-13* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996), 45-7. The caveat being that most scholars do not trace the Fool's Speech into ch. 13.

<sup>717</sup> E.g. J. Zmijewski, *Der Stil der paulinischen "Narrenrede". Analyse der Sprachgestaltung in 2 Kor 11,1-12,10 als Beitrag zur Methodik von Stiluntersuchungen Neutestamentlicher Texte*, BBB 52 (Bonn: Köhl, 1978), 412-22; Witherington, *Corinthians*, 442-444;

<sup>718</sup> Lambrecht, 'Speech', 323.

<sup>719</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>720</sup> Harris, *Corinthians*, 869; Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:834; Lambrecht, 'Speech', 324.

<sup>721</sup> A. J. Dewey, 'A Matter of Honor: A Social-Historical Analysis of 2 Corinthians 10,' *Harvard Theological Review* 78, no. 1 (1985): 209-17 [209-10] and J. Sanchez Bosch, "Gloriarse" *Segun San Paolo: Sentido Y Teologia de Kauchaomai*, AnBib 40 (Roma: Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1970), 134-60. Gathercole, *Boasting*, 90; 108-11.

The numerous attempts to identify the historical antecedents to Paul's unique claims begin with Windisch, who suggested that Paul embodies the stock character of the 'boaster' or 'braggert' (ὁ ἀλαζών). This role, commonly assigned in Greek theatre, portrayed an individual who is out of touch with the proper criteria for status and pride.<sup>722</sup> The seminal study of Betz substantiated this suggestion by identifying literary parallels between Paul's discourse and the speech of Alcibiades in the *Symposium* or Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*.<sup>723</sup> Welborn has since clarified Windisch's claim, suggesting that Paul is playing a *theatrical mime*: he too makes boasts, but these deeply ironic and calamitous claims are meant to draw attention to a crucial discovery—the 'grace that is sufficient' (cf. 12.9).<sup>724</sup>

There is no question that Paul's fool motif has ancient predecessors and that his language elicits irony by contradicting normative construals of status in Corinth (cf. 3.1-2; 10.12). Some scholars have rightly criticized the proposed connection between Paul and Greek theatre because he never shows any explicit knowledge of it.<sup>725</sup> But the larger difficulty with studies on the Fool's Speech is a lack of theological awareness. Welborn is right to conclude his article by pointing to Paul's experience of grace (12.9), but he does not develop how this grace, or the broader experience of strength in weakness, affects one's interpretation of the Fool's Speech and the grounds upon which Paul makes his boast. This is a general trend in the literature, which is made all the more surprising when one considers that 12.9-10—which focuses on Paul's experience of grace—is widely considered the climax of the Fool's Speech.<sup>726</sup> In fact, Hughes refers to this passage as 'the summit of the epistle....From this vantage-point the entire range of Paul's apostleship is

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<sup>722</sup> Windisch, *Korintherbrief*, 316.

<sup>723</sup> Betz, *Sokratische*, 74-5.

<sup>724</sup> L. L. Welborn, 'The Runaway Paul', *HTR* 92, no. 2 (1999): 115-63 [161]. For more on the literary parallels of the Fool's Speech, see Zmijewski, "'Narrenrede'", 236-275.

<sup>725</sup> Barrett, *Corinthians*, 290: the connection is 'at best an extremely remote parallel'. Also see Heckel, *Kraft*, 194.

<sup>726</sup> Martin, *Corinthians*, 392, 419; Áida Besançon Spencer, 'The Wise Fool (and the Foolish Wise): A Study of Irony in Paul', *NovT* 23, no. 4 (October 1981): 349-60 [356-57]; Lambrecht, 'Speech', 324.



seen in focus.<sup>727</sup> This suggests that by understanding Paul's argument in 12.9-10, one may grasp Paul's intention in the Fool's Speech and in 2 Corinthians 10-13 more generally. In the following section, I prepare for an analysis of 12.9-10 by considering its immediate context in 12.1ff. This will also offer the occasion to begin developing how Paul's theology complements historical analysis of the Fool's Speech (11.1-12.11): if one ascertains the paradoxical meaning of strength in weakness (12.1-10), Paul's argument becomes even *more* 'foolish' than what is perceived by Windisch, Betz, Welborn, and others.

## II. Why Strength in Weakness?: A Grand Polarity of Strength or Weakness

After beginning his Fool's Speech in 11.1 to highlight his sufferings—e.g. shipwrecks, hunger, and anxiety—Paul continues his discourse in 12.1. He indicates that he 'must go on boasting' (v. 1), albeit with a subtle change. The apostle now recounts 'visions [ὀπτασίαι] and revelations [ἀποκάλυψεις]', although there is 'nothing to be gained [οὐ συμφέρω]' (v. 1b). Paul conspicuously refers to a 'man in Christ [ἄνθρωπον ἐν Χριστῷ]...who was caught up to the third heaven [ἄρπαγέντα τὸν τοιοῦτον ἕως τρίτου οὐρανοῦ]' (v. 2). Yet the content of his revelation is incommunicable (v. 4). Paul then resumes his argument about boasting, stating that he boasts 'on behalf of this man', but he otherwise boasts only of his weaknesses (v. 5). As one might imagine, this passage has long been confusing to interpreters!<sup>728</sup> Guthrie suggests that it is 'one of the most debated in Pauline literature.'<sup>729</sup> But lest the interpreter wish to gloss over it, the passage notably forms the context for the climax of the Fool's Speech and 2 Corinthians itself (12.7-10). So how might this enigma contribute to Paul's argument?

<sup>727</sup> Hughes, *Corinthians*, 451. See sec. I of Ch. 1 for more discussion of this climax.

<sup>728</sup> See the comments in e.g. Jeremy Barrier, 'Visions of Weakness: Apocalyptic Genre and the Identification of Paul's Opponents in 2 Corinthians 12:1-6', *Restoration Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (2005): 33-42 [33] and Robert M Price, 'Punished in Paradise (An Exegetical Theory on 2 Corinthians 12:1-10)', *JSNT* 7 (April 1980): 33-40 [33].

<sup>729</sup> Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 576.

*i. A Negative Paradigm: The Polarized Ascent to Paradise (v. 1-6)*

The beginning of the ascent to paradise is perhaps its most difficult section, where Paul appears to veer widely from his argument by discussing the journey to the third heaven completed by the ἄνθρωπον ἐν Χριστῷ (v. 2). It is almost unanimously recognized that Paul is the unnamed visionary in this passage.<sup>730</sup> The apostle is certainly purported to have visionary experiences elsewhere (e.g. Acts 9.1-19; 18.9), and it seems improbable that much would be made of an anonymous individual with no apparent connection to the Corinthians. But Paul's motivation for making an anonymous self-reference is more difficult to explain. Harvey suggests that Paul expresses the vision using the resources of 'Jewish literature', especially the tradition of writing anonymously to avoid distracting from the vision's content (e.g. Ascen. Isa. 1).<sup>731</sup> This seems unlikely, however, given that Paul does not report on such content (v. 4)! Others argue that the event was so overwhelming that Paul is unsure whether he experienced the third heaven or saw someone doing so.<sup>732</sup> Still others, especially Lincoln, suggest that it is an attempt to exercise humility: 'He does not praise himself but another described as ἄνθρωπον ἐν Χριστῷ' (v. 2).<sup>733</sup> The last option is the best given that the second is difficult to prove and an interest in humility resonates with Paul's remarks elsewhere (e.g. 3.5; 10.13). Yet even this solution is problematic. Must Paul describe himself anonymously when he already denies proud boasting in v. 5? And does Paul's obfuscation accomplish its intended goal when he openly claims to have revelations of 'surpassing greatness [ὑπερβολή]' (v. 7)? The other confusing detail is the

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<sup>730</sup> See e.g. Harris, *Corinthians*, 834-35; Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:778; Barnett, *Corinthians*, 562.

<sup>731</sup> Harvey, *Renewal*, 103. For more information, see the excellent overview of this position in Garland, *Corinthians*, 510.

<sup>732</sup> See e.g. James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1997), 214-15 and Margaret Thrall, 'Paul's Journey to Paradise: Some Exegetical Issues in 2 Cor 12.2-4', in *The Corinthians Correspondence*, ed. Reimund Bieringer (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 347-63 [352-53].

<sup>733</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, 'Paul the Visionary: The Setting and Significance of the Rapture to Paradise in II Corinthians 12:1-10', *NTS* 25, no. 2 (1979): 204-20 [208-09].

dating of the vision to 'fourteen years ago [πρὸ ἐτῶν δεκατεσσάρων]' (v. 2). Many interpreters argue that Paul cites a past revelation because it was presumably unknown to the Corinthians, and thus demonstrates that he is not an eager discloser of his privileged experiences.<sup>734</sup> But this explanation does not consider whether Paul had theological grounds for distancing himself from the event. Might his old attitude toward the revelation represent an illegitimate view of power?

The difficult details of Paul's ascent to paradise have probably contributed to the burgeoning interest in a more tangible issue: the background for the vision. An apocalyptic source, especially works such as *Slavonic Enoch* and the *Testament of Levi*, are typically proposed as key antecedents given their multi-level cosmology (cf. 12.2) and sense of heavenly exploration (cf. 12.3-4).<sup>735</sup> What is common to many of these proposals is the affirmation, to be discussed below, that Paul's visions were generally positive experiences and legitimate grounds for boasting. This has led to Gooder's provocative thesis, which argues that Paul experienced a failed ascent to paradise. This is similar to Betz's argument that the whole account is a Socratic parody given the apostle's inability to discuss what he experienced.<sup>736</sup> But Gooder's argument is more persuasive because she engages with the ascent's nascent theology. She argues that 2 Corinthians 12 has few similarities with Jewish texts that describe a heavenly ascent—in particular, it lacks a glorious revelation from the Lord.<sup>737</sup> The connection is further severed if one contextualizes Paul's ascent with, for instance, *Slavonic Enoch*, given that it propounds a seven heaven cosmology.<sup>738</sup> Gooder concludes that Paul's ascent—*only* to the third heaven—did not end in pride. Instead, it

<sup>734</sup> See e.g. Garland, *Corinthians*, 512; Lincoln, 'Visionary', 205; Harris, *Corinthians*, 837.

<sup>735</sup> See e.g. Lincoln, 'Visionary', 212; Price, 'Paradise', 34-5; C.R.A. Morray-Jones, 'Paradise Revisited (2 Cor 12:1-12): The Jewish Mystical Background of Paul's Apostolate', *HTR* 86, no. 3 (July 1993): 265-92 [265-68].

<sup>736</sup> Betz, *Sokratische*, 89.

<sup>737</sup> Paula Gooder, *Only the Third Heaven?: 2 Corinthians 12.1-10 and Heavenly Ascent*, LNTS 313 (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 165-89; 191.

<sup>738</sup> *Ibid.*, 190-91.

resonates with his ministry by serving as 'one more example of weakness in a long list of weaknesses.'<sup>739</sup>

To bolster her arguments, Gooder develops a unique connection between Paul's heavenly ascent and his thorn in the flesh. Most interpreters view the thorn as a response to Paul's ascent: 'Because of the surpassing greatness [ὑπερβολή] of the revelations, a thorn [σκόλοψ] was given me in the flesh [σάρξ]' (v. 7a). This means that the thorn is a reactionary tool given to an apostle who is already proud and in need of weakness.<sup>740</sup> But building upon the work of Morray-Jones and Price, Gooder argues that the thorn is a component of Paul's visions.<sup>741</sup> While the thorn may have an earthly manifestation, Paul describes it as a cosmic intruder to his vision—an 'angel of Satan' (v. 7a). In this sense, the thorn prevents Paul from being 'conceited' before the process can even begin (v. 7b).

Gooder's thesis is certainly interesting, perhaps even persuasive in its tracing of the historical and literary context. A connection with *Slavonic Enoch* or the *Testament of Levi* is plausible, but less than certain, and Gooder provides significant evidence against it. It is with respect to the exegesis that Gooder's thesis encounters difficulty. The first issue concerns Paul's rationale for the thorn: it was given 'so that I might not be conceited [ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι]' (v. 7b). This seems to imply that the ascent was not a failure, but that Paul has the potential to be proud, even if this did not eventuate. In fact, the most natural reading is to envision a proud Paul given the 'surpassing greatness' of the visions (v. 7a) and the strength of the term ὑπεραίρω.<sup>742</sup> The latter is reflected in the translation that the thorn prevents Paul from being 'too elated' (v. 7b), thus suggesting the diminishment of a

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<sup>739</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>740</sup> E.g. Garland, *Corinthians*, 519; Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:806; Barnett, *Corinthians*, 568.

<sup>741</sup> Gooder, *Heaven*, 200-01. Cf. Morray-Jones, 'Paradise', 281-2; Price, 'Paradise', 38-9.

<sup>742</sup> This term refers to deep pride and egoism. See 'ὑπεραίρω' (BDAG, 3rd ed.), 1031-32; 2 Th. 2.4.

*pre-existing pride*.<sup>743</sup> Either way, the need for the thorn suggests, whether Paul is proud or not, that these visions were sending him along the wrong path, one which is associated with overbearing pride. Unfortunately, Gooder says little about these dynamics and the meaning of ὑπεραίρω.<sup>744</sup> Although she is right to emphasize that the thorn is introduced immediately after Paul's ascent, there is still a sense of distinction between the events given Paul's use of the causative δίο (v. 7a). Finally, Gooder's argument that her interpretation aligns best with Paul's theology is questionable at best: Paul has not been saying that he is *weak* alone, but that he is *strong in weakness*. Gooder makes the mistake—all too common in the literature—of treating the paradox like a polarity.<sup>745</sup>

There are, however, two ways in which Gooder is absolutely correct. First, she argues against the consensus that holds that the ascent was a positive experience for Paul. This insight is significant because many interpreters focus on how Paul uses his vision to 'beat his opponents at their own game'.<sup>746</sup> But such an explanation does not capture Paul's hesitation in citing his experience. He is willing to boast 'on behalf of this man', although he does not want to boast on his own behalf (v. 5). In fact, Paul even wants the Corinthians to think no more of him than what they see or hear (v. 6b)—an apparent admission of the community's accusations (i.e. 10.10). This is hardly a triumphant rally against the opponents! Second, Gooder rightly suggests that interpreters rarely consider how this passage should be interpreted in relation to the paradox of strength in weakness. Given that the ascent is a past event, I suggest that one should be thinking about the passage on similar—though considerably different—theological lines: its relationship to the Corinthian polarity of strength or weakness. As mentioned previously, Paul's hesitancy to

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<sup>743</sup> See the discussion in Harris, *Corinthians*, 852. This translation is used in the RSV and NRSV.

<sup>744</sup> See Gooder, *Heaven*, 200 for her brief discussion of ὑπεραίρω.

<sup>745</sup> See sec. VII.i-iii of Ch. 3 for further discussion.

<sup>746</sup> Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:772. Also Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 457 and Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 576-77.

discuss the vision may signal that he is no longer proud of it. This fits the strategy employed in the 'affliction in Asia' narrative (1.8-11), where Paul stresses his past despair before offering a paradigm for how the pained Corinthians could receive the paradoxical comfort of God.<sup>747</sup> Here the extremity of that experience simply appears reversed: Paul's ascent does not lead to despair, but to pride and conceit (v. 7). Like the change in tone in 2 Corinthians 10-11, Paul appears to adjust his self-description in 12.1-6 to address the Corinthians' pursuit of strength. The ascent to paradise is a parable-like warning pulled from Paul's former life which illustrates to the community the inherent danger of pursuing a strength that is totally set apart from weakness. It caused Paul to fall into conceit, and now he barely speaks of the experience because, as we will see, what is really true about his life is not a polarity of strength or weakness, but a paradox of strength in weakness.

Of course, the above proposal could be criticized as a somewhat drastic departure from prevailing views. The ascent has traditionally been interpreted as a 'highly personal' event<sup>748</sup> that is meant to provide 'justification' for 'the apostle as a "visionary"'.<sup>749</sup> So the suggestion that Paul forms a negative paradigm for the Corinthians appears to overlook the episode's more immediate purpose of proving apostolic legitimacy. However, my proposal is not meant to deny this dimension of Paul's argument as the apostle clearly suggests that he *could* boast 'on behalf of this man' (v. 5). My point is simply that he refrains (v. 6b), noting that the greatness of his revelations prove to be a means to conceit (v. 7). It is this final fact that has not been sufficiently emphasized in interpretations of the passage. Even Harris's analysis, which notably emphasizes Paul's ambivalence toward boasting, does not

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<sup>747</sup> See sec. II.iii of Ch. 3.

<sup>748</sup> Garland, *Corinthians*, 511.

<sup>749</sup> Lincoln, 'Visionary', 204. See also Güttgemanns, *Apostel*, 155-156 and Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:772.

go far enough.<sup>750</sup> Within 2 Corinthians, pride and selfishness are attributed to the Corinthians (e.g. 10.7; 12; 11.7), whereas the apostle wants to be perceived as humble and uninhibited by the lure of status (e.g. 10.1; 11.30). In fact, he uses ἐπαίρω (a cognate of ὑπεραίρω in 12.7) to describe the impressive displays made by the opponents to woo the Corinthians (11.20). The implication is that Paul's prior interest in powerful visions is no better than the opponents' outsized claims to strength. As a result, there is little positive value in the ascent to paradise for Paul's argument regarding strength in weakness.

The connection between Paul's ascent to paradise and the Corinthians' situation is furthered by the immediate context of 12.1-6, which is the final suffering catalogue of the letter, where Paul recounts his beatings, anxieties, and above all, his weakness (11.21-29). As discussed previously, this is the catalogue in which Paul demonstrates that his understanding of weakness is broad enough to include knowledge, emotions, behaviours and external circumstances, including the Corinthians' pain.<sup>751</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, Paul is still implicitly addressing the community in 12.1-6. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Paul refers to himself as 'a man in Christ [ἄνθρωπον ἐν Χριστῷ]' (v. 2). This is the only detail given in an otherwise paltry self-description. Such a lack of detail highlights this lone characteristic of Paul: he is identified with Christ, which suggests that his experience need not be limited to himself. In fact, this paradigmatic gesture is used throughout 2 Corinthians (e.g. 1.5-6; 4.10). Like many of his discourses, Paul highlights the Christological ground that he shares with the Corinthians. This is not to suggest that they experience the same visions as Paul, merely that they are pursuing a similar strength—one that produces conceit (v. 7)—and could be subject to whatever solution the apostle wishes to disclose about his former life.

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<sup>750</sup> Harris, *Corinthians*, 834-35.

<sup>751</sup> See sec. IV.i of Ch. 2.

All of the above suggests that Paul's ascent to paradise is paradigmatic for the Corinthians in the sense that Paul is modeling, from his past life, the kind of strength that they are presently pursuing. The issue is not visions themselves, but the attitude with which the Corinthians approach all opportunities for power. They are pursuing *the wrong kind of strength*: a strength in antithesis to weakness, accompanied only by powerful experiences. Rather than critiquing the community directly, Paul shows them that he once pursued this kind of strength too. Although my reading cannot be conclusively proven, it is more plausible than prevailing interpretations because it considers carefully how the ascent relates to Paul's theological argument, and it honours the sense in which Paul hesitates, and ultimately refrains from boasting, due to the potential for pride.<sup>752</sup> Paul has begun a narrative of error that subtly addresses the Corinthians, but it remains to be seen what he aims to do with this developing storyline, or what the narrative's larger structure might be.

*ii. Sourcing the Pauline Experience: Who Gave the Thorn in the Flesh? (v. 7)*

The narrative of the apostle's past continues with the advent of a troubling experience. Paul confirms that his ascent did not bring a legitimate form of power when he says that due to 'the surpassing greatness of the revelations' he was 'given [δίδωμι]' a 'thorn in the flesh [σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί]' (v. 7b). The crucial theological question is: who gave the thorn to Paul? But before this question is answered, one has to clarify—as much as possible—the nature of the thorn. The difficulty is, as Kierkegaard memorably stated, that the thorn's ambiguity has 'afforded an uncommonly favourable opportunity for everyone

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<sup>752</sup> *Contra* e.g. Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:772 and Barnett, *Corinthians*, 556.



to become an interpreter of the Bible.<sup>753</sup> So the survey that follows is necessarily focused on the major options.

A significant body of interpreters takes the thorn to be a physical affliction.<sup>754</sup> This view possibly originates with Cyprian, who translated σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί with the phrase *stimulus carnis*.<sup>755</sup> In this reading, the flesh refers to Paul's physical nature—a struggle with his body. This produces several imaginative proposals, including headaches,<sup>756</sup> epilepsy,<sup>757</sup> or malaria.<sup>758</sup> But none of these suggestions are well-founded. The more common diagnosis is an eye problem, which is supported by 1) the Galatians' willingness to offer their 'eyes [ὀφθαλμοί]' to Paul (Gal. 4.15) and 2) Paul's use of large script (Gal 6.11). Witherington consequently refers to the apostle as 'a visionary with bad eyes.'<sup>759</sup> But a more defensible position—at least as it concerns the evidence in 2 Corinthians—is that Paul had some kind of speech impediment (cf. 10.10; 11.6).

Another set of conclusions understand Paul's σκόλοψ to represent his experience of persecution and opposition. This view receives support given its resonance with the context of 2 Corinthians: an ongoing conflict with the Corinthian community.<sup>760</sup> There is also a connection between the opponents, labelled as servants of Satan (11.14-15), and Paul's interpretation of the thorn as a 'messenger of Satan [ἄγγελος σατανᾶ]' (12.7). But these observations are not determinative, and this view seems unlikely given that Paul's reference to the 'flesh' (v. 7) is more plausibly read as a personal struggle (spiritual or

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<sup>753</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Edifying Discourses*, Vol. 11, Tr. David F. Swenson and Lilian Marvin Swenson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1962), 164.

<sup>754</sup> For a detailed summary of this position, see Nicdao, 'Weakness', 525-41.

<sup>755</sup> Cyprian, *De mortalitate*, in PL 4, cols. 581-602.

<sup>756</sup> See e.g. Heckel, *Kraft*, 92 and E.A. Johnson, 'St. Paul's Infirmary' *ExpT* 39 (June 1928): 428-29.

<sup>757</sup> See e.g. Max Krenkel, *Beiträge zur aufhellung der Geschichte und der Briefe des Apostels Paulus* (Braunschweig: C.A. Schwetschke und Sohn, 1890), 66-124 and D.E. Donley, 'The Epilepsy of St. Paul', *CBQ* 6 (1944): 358-60.

<sup>758</sup> See e.g. W.M. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1897), 62-4 and Allo, *Corinthiens*, 320-21.

<sup>759</sup> Witherington, *Corinthians*, 463.

<sup>760</sup> For more on this rationale, see the discussion in Nicdao, *Weakness*, 545-56.

physical).<sup>761</sup> The apostle is cognizant that the Corinthians are suffering more than him (2.1-7; cf. 12.10), making it likelier that he views himself as their thorn rather than the reverse!

The final, and perhaps most common view, is to interpret the thorn in the flesh as a moral or spiritual torment.<sup>762</sup> This is often established by arguing that τῇ σαρκί (v. 7) is a dative of place, thus creating the translation a 'thorn of the flesh' (i.e. located in the flesh).<sup>763</sup> Some interpreters conclude that the thorn is a carnal temptation, perhaps even a battle with lust.<sup>764</sup> According to Lightfoot, this view was very common in the Middle Ages—even being adopted by Aquinas.<sup>765</sup> But before one can speculate about Paul's temptations, all of the terms used to create the thorn in the flesh metaphor must be taken into account. In the first place, it is a 'thorn [σκόλοψ]' (v. 7b).<sup>766</sup> This inherently physical imagery is complemented by the thorn's function: to 'beat [κολαρίζω]' Paul (v. 7b).<sup>767</sup> This could have deeply spiritual connotations—Luther certainly read it this way<sup>768</sup>—but this resists how Paul otherwise employs the term (i.e. 1 Cor. 4.11), and its typical meaning in ancient literature.<sup>769</sup> The phrase ἄγγελος σατανᾶ (v. 7b) is also crucial. Most interpreters rightly view this phrase in apposition to the thorn in the flesh.<sup>770</sup> In this sense, the thorn is not to be conflated with the messenger of Satan—as though Paul said 'a thorn in the flesh

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<sup>761</sup> It is widely recognized that 2 Cor. 12.1-10 is focused on Paul's person: see e.g. Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 457-59 and Garland, *Corinthians*, 507-08.

<sup>762</sup> For a summary of this position and its adherents, see Nicdao, *Weakness*, 550-61.

<sup>763</sup> See e.g. Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 587 and Nicdao, *Weakness*, 551.

<sup>764</sup> See e.g. J. Döller, 'Der "stimulus carnis" beim Apostel Paulus,' *ZkT* 26 (1902): 208-211 and V.A. Holmes-Georges, 'The Thorn in the Flesh,' *Theology* 32 (1936): 111-112. For more on the rationale of this position, see Ulrich Heckel, 'Der Dorn im Fleisch. Die Krankheit des Paul in 2 Kor 12,7 und Gal 4,13f.,' *ZNW* 84 (1993): 65-92 [68].

<sup>765</sup> J.B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians: a revised text* (London: Macmillan, 1890), 188.

<sup>766</sup> The term is a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament. See 'σκόλοψ' (BDAG, 3rd ed.), 930-31.

<sup>767</sup> See e.g. 1 Cor. 4.11; Mt 26.67; 1 Pt 2.20. Also see 'κολαρίζω' (BDAG, 3rd ed.), 555. David Michael Park, 'Paul's Skolops Tē Sarki: Thorn or Stake (2 Cor 12:7),' *NovT* 22, no. 2 (April 1980): 179-83 reviews instances in antiquity where 'σκόλοψ' is used in a physical sense, referring to stakes or armaments.

<sup>768</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert, LCC 18 (London: SCM Press, 1955), 51; 60; 119.

<sup>769</sup> See fn. 768 above.

<sup>770</sup> See e.g. Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 446; Harris, *Corinthians*, 885; Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:811.

which belongs to Satan'. Instead, this is simply the interpretation Paul applies to the thorn. It is such a troubling experience that he attributes it to Satan, a dark spiritual power (e.g. Rom. 16.20; 1 Cor. 5.5; 1 Th. 2.18).

Although there are fuller surveys of the options for the thorn in the flesh, a sufficient amount of data has been provided to reach a conclusion.<sup>771</sup> The specific diagnoses of the physical interpretation are too specific to provide any certainty, but there are good arguments to suggest Paul's thorn is physical in some sense, not least being the opponents' accusation that Paul's 'appearance [παρουσία τοῦ σώματος]' is weak (10.10). But given that Paul interprets the thorn in the flesh with the appositional phrase 'a messenger of Satan' (12.7), the thorn must be viewed as more than a physical problem. Therefore, Paul's thorn in the flesh is *likely* a physical thorn, which *certainly* has spiritual implications for his life and ministry. The view that the thorn refers to the opponents is rejected because it simply does not make sense of the metaphor's terminology or the dynamics of the conflict established previously.

The key conclusion arising from this, however, concerns the wider conceptual frame in which Paul places the thorn in the flesh. Nicdao states, 'What is really important for Paul's argumentation in v. 7 is the nature and origin of Paul's σκόλοψ as opposed to its precise identity.'<sup>772</sup> Bultmann likewise says, 'The diagnosis is irrelevant to the context'.<sup>773</sup> A commonality amongst the proposals concerning the thorn, and especially my preferred solution, is that it renders Paul inadequate, troubled, and despairing. This is nowhere more evident than in the following verse, where Paul pleads for the Lord to remove the thorn (v. 8). In other words, the thorn in the flesh is clearly a *weakness* for Paul. Heckel likewise

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<sup>771</sup> For fuller surveys, see Nicdao, *Weakness*, 524-83 and Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:809-18.

<sup>772</sup> Nicdao, *Weakness*, 525.

<sup>773</sup> Bultmann, *Corinthians*, 225.

describes the thorn as an externally inflicted, persistently painful 'Pauline weakness.'<sup>774</sup> It is especially interesting that the image used by Paul to express his weakness appears, as Heckel says, to elicit feelings of pain. A σκόλοψ is typically a sharp object that causes injury.<sup>775</sup> Hughes likewise comments that the thorn in the flesh conjures images of 'a body helplessly impaled.'<sup>776</sup> This signals that Paul's subtle appeal to the Corinthian community continues. The ascent to paradise models the Corinthians' pursuit of the wrong kind of strength and, following this, Paul refers to a personal weakness using unpleasant imagery that is meant to demonstrate that he has felt pains not unlike those experienced by the community following his previous visit and letter (cf. 2.1-7; 7.5-16).

This view on the thorn in the flesh renders the discussion on ἐδόθη (v. 7b) far more interesting. Paul did not find the thorn nor invent it; it was given to him by a being independent of himself. The apostle interprets the thorn as an ἄγγελος σατανᾶ and his impending struggle with the thorn (v. 8) suggests that this experience was attributable only to the forces of evil. Consequently, the natural choice for the agent behind the thorn is a messenger of Satan. But most scholars argue that ἐδόθη is an instance of the *divine passive*—meaning that God is the ultimate source of the thorn.<sup>777</sup> This resonates with Paul's view of God as a powerful and sovereign being, not least in 2 Corinthians where Paul is consistently contrasting God's competence and humanity's impotence (e.g. 3.5; 4.7b). Furthermore, Plummer rightly notes that if Paul were only expressing Satan's responsibility for the thorn, he would not have dignified his actions with a form of δίδωμι. This verb is

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<sup>774</sup> Heckel, *Kraft*, 81-82.

<sup>775</sup> See fnt. 761 above.

<sup>776</sup> Hughes, *Corinthians*, 447.

<sup>777</sup> See e.g. Collins, *Corinthians*, 238-29; Garland, *Corinthians*, 518-20; Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:806. Some scholars, such as Harris, *Corinthians*, 856 and Martin, *Corinthians*, 412, suggest a double origin in which God *and* Satan give the thorn. My point here is simply that God holds some responsibility for Paul's weakness.

typically used for 'divine favours' (e.g. Gal. 3.21; 1 Tim. 4.14)<sup>778</sup> and is often employed by Paul in conjunction with the χάρις word group.<sup>779</sup> The surprising implication is that Paul views the thorn as a divine gift. This is reminiscent of Phil. 1.29: 'For it has been granted [χαρίζομαι] to you that...you should not only believe in his name but suffer [πάσχω] for his sake.' Although God is not allied with Satan in 2 Cor 12.7, he gives the thorn to Paul in that he *allows*, even *sends*, the messenger of Satan.<sup>780</sup> Yet, as we shall see, he also provides a solution to the thorn, and in doing so, shows that he opposes the forces of torment.<sup>781</sup>

The divine origin of Paul's weakness is important because it shows that God can give both strength and weakness (cf. 12.9). Although many interpreters recognize the divine passive in v. 7, they fail to consider how this affects their view of the thorn. Guthrie is representative when he says that the thorn is for 'the display of God's power.'<sup>782</sup> But to describe Paul's weakness as the locus of God's power is misleading, especially when it is given precisely to keep Paul from being 'conceited [ὑπεραίρω]' (v. 7). Paul's experience of the thorn works against his misguided quest for power. There are two contradictory realities in this narrative—strength (v. 1-6) and weakness (v. 7)—and how they relate to one another beyond a simple contrast is not yet clear. What has become clear, however, is that the divine origin of the thorn changes one's view of the strength in weakness paradox (v. 9b-10). It *cannot* be read as the mere addition of divine strength to human weakness. As the master choreographer, God gives Paul two opposed entities and it is not until v. 9b-10 that we learn why he has done this. But before these verses are analyzed, one needs to consider the meaning of Paul's narrative.

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<sup>778</sup> See esp. Plummer's comments in *Corinthians*, 348.

<sup>779</sup> See e.g. Rom. 12.3; 12.6; 1 Cor. 1.4; 2 Cor. 8.1; Gal. 2.9.

<sup>780</sup> Paul elsewhere appears to believe that God utilizes Satan to achieve redemptive purposes, especially concerning those who have strayed from his gospel (e.g. 1 Cor. 5.5; cf. 1 Tim. 1.20).

<sup>781</sup> See p. 234-74 below.

<sup>782</sup> E.g. Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 590; Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:808, 18; Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 444; Heckel, *Kraft*, 81-82; Schmeller, *Korinther*, II:305.

iii. *There and Back Again: Paul's Grand Polarity* (v. 8)

As noted above, Paul's initial perception of the thorn in the flesh is purely negative. He makes an urgent request for help: 'Three times I pleaded [παρακαλέω] with the Lord about this, that it should leave [ἀφιστήμι] me' (v. 8). Seifrid is correct to call Paul a 'poor Stoic' in this instance.<sup>783</sup> He is not trying to overcome the thorn through self-control and contentment. The thorn has defeated him, so he bids it leave. This seems similar to the paradigmatic experiences noted earlier: the apostle is weak and defeated by his circumstances prior to receiving divine relief (cf. 1.8-11; 6.3-10). But there is a nuance here—Paul is actively trying to pray his weakness away. The thorn has not merely *defeated* Paul, it is also *animating* him. The emphasis rests on Paul's repeated prayers—he prays not once, but 'three times [τρεις]' (v. 8). His defeat has not caused him to flounder in weakness; rather, it encourages him to revolt and fight against it. But interpreters rarely, if at all, comment on this dynamic.<sup>784</sup> In fact, several think Paul's prayer is positively Christ-like.<sup>785</sup> They fail to consider what Paul could have said: 'I accept this thorn' or 'I recognize that this thorn will bring strength'. Instead, Paul envisions his weakness as a barrier to strength.

When one reads Paul's pleading in light of his thorny weakness and visionary pride, one begins to see the larger shape of the apostle's past narrative. The plot of v. 1-8 mirrors the Corinthians' present crisis by representing naked strength and weakness, including the sense in which their weakness fuels a desire for superiority.<sup>786</sup> In the experience of strength (i.e. heavenly visions), Paul was beset by weakness (i.e. the thorn) and, unable to accept

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<sup>783</sup> Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 448. For more on the possible historical antecedents to this prayer for healing, see esp. Hans Dieter Betz, 'Eine Christus-Aretalogie bei Paulus (2Kor 12,7-10),' *ZTK* 66, no. 3 (1969): 288-305 [290-303].

<sup>784</sup> E.g. Barrett, *Corinthians*, 316; Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 464; Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:818-19.

<sup>785</sup> Plummer, *Corinthians*, 353; Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 448; Martin, *Corinthians*, 417. An oft-cited parallel to Paul's prayer is Jesus's prayer in Gethsemane (i.e. Mt 26.36-56). Although Paul prays three times, like Jesus, interpreters fail to recognize the significant difference: Jesus says 'not as I will, but as you will' (v. 39). No such surrender is present in Paul. For further discussion, see p. 269-72.

<sup>786</sup> See sec. IV.ii of Ch. 2 for more on Corinthian shame and their honour pursuits.

the co-existence of strength and weakness, pleads for release from weakness. Also important is the coherence this reading brings to the larger narrative in 12.1-10, where most interpreters emphasize that the ascent and the thorn are positive proofs for Paul's argument. By viewing these experiences as opposite ends of a polarity, however, one gains a greater appreciation for why Paul concludes the ascent in *conceit* (v. 7) and the thorn in *despair* (v. 8). This foreshadows the shift that occurs between v. 8 and v. 9a: the proper relationship between strength and weakness is ultimately more complex than a simple contrast or even co-existence. They must co-exist, while also being changed themselves so that the output is not a mixture of pride and despair. The damning nature of Paul's narrative is punctuated by his use of παρακαλέω (v. 8). This term is used earlier to express God's paradoxical comfort (1.3-11). But here the verb's significance is somewhat reversed; it indicates Paul's pleading to the Lord and thus a refusal of divine comfort. Paul does not want weakness to qualify and control his strength, he only wants what will make him strong. So it is his exhortation to God, his παρακαλέω, that he seeks. But this term nonetheless remains the harbinger of God's comfort. Even if Paul did not welcome the paradox, the Lord sends it to create one of the defining moments of the apostle's life.

### III. The Climax of Strength in Weakness (12.9-10)

<sup>9a</sup> καὶ εἰρηκέν μοι· ἀρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου, ἡ γὰρ δύναμις [μου] ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελεῖται.

<sup>b</sup> Ἡδιστα οὖν μᾶλλον καυχῆσομαι ἐν ταῖς ἀσθενείαις μου, ὥστε ἐπισκηνώσῃ ἐπ' ἐμὲ ἡ

δύναμις τοῦ Χριστοῦ. <sup>10</sup> διὸ εὐδοκῶ ἐν ἀσθενείαις, ἐν ὕβρεσιν, ἐν ἀνάγκαις, ἐν διωγμοῖς καὶ στενοχωρίαις, ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ· ὅταν γὰρ ἀσθενῶ, τότε δυνατός εἰμι.

*i. The Lord's Subversive Response (v. 9)*

Paul begins the theological climax of 2 Corinthians with καὶ εἰρηκέν μοι—his lament over the thorn is interrupted by the divine voice. Where the previous text was indirect speech, Paul now refers to the direct speech of the Lord: 'My grace is sufficient for you; for my power is made perfect in weakness [ἀρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου, ἡ γὰρ δύναμις [μου] ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελεῖται]' (v. 9). There is some debate about the original text as several key witnesses, including Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus, do not include the second μου.<sup>787</sup> The term is only present in these manuscript traditions at a later date, thus suggesting that a scribe added the word to provide greater theological clarity. A common conclusion is to accept the rendering that drops the second μου, which might suggest a more general, proverbial reading: strength is perfected in weakness. However, the meaning of this verse is altered little, if at all, by accepting that it is a proverb. Most of the interpreters who adopt the likelier text recognize that the power in question is still the Lord's given that Paul proceeds to describe this power as the δύναμις τοῦ Χριστοῦ (v. 9b).<sup>788</sup> Therefore, I adopt the reading that includes the second μου because it is a legitimate interpretive gloss that makes clearer what most interpreters assume to be true.

Despite the importance of what the Lord said to Paul, the response in v. 9 is most significant for what it does not say: there is no recognition of Paul's requests (v. 8). His thorn has not been removed. In fact, his polarity of strength and weakness is totally subverted. There is a recognition amongst scholars that a theological shift occurs here.<sup>789</sup> But the difference between Paul's pleading for relief and the Lord's word is vastly

<sup>787</sup> E.g. P<sup>46</sup>, N\*, A\*, B, D\*; in favour of μου: N<sup>2</sup>, A<sup>c</sup>; D<sup>1</sup>; K; L (see NA 28 for more).

<sup>788</sup> See e.g. Barrett, *Corinthians*, 316-17; Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:821-22; Martin, *Corinthians*, 419-20.

<sup>789</sup> See e.g. Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 448-49 and Garland, *Corinthians*, 523.



underemphasized. It is typically portrayed as an unexpected answer to prayer.<sup>790</sup> But a new horizon is dawning for Paul, where the pragmatic difference between God and humanity is evident: what caused Paul to panic does little to God; he is able to address the troubling thorn. And how so? The Lord's word must be analyzed carefully because it is invested with a certain 'theologische Dignität' via its divine origin.<sup>791</sup> It is especially important to understand its most conspicuous terms—*δύναμις* and *ἀσθένεια*. Their inclusion recalls Paul's experiences of strength (v. 2-4) and weakness (v. 7). But now that these polar realities are being addressed from the Lord's mouth, it is likely that the *relationship* between them will be modified and, as a result, the entities themselves will change. The Lord is prescribing that his strength is 'perfected [*τελέω*]' in weakness (v. 9). This response must hold implications that press deeper than Paul's circumstances, otherwise the Lord would have simply removed the thorn. This is often missed by interpreters who think the *Herrnwort* is purely meant to overthrow the opponents' claims.<sup>792</sup> Such a conclusion sounds like the mistake being corrected by v. 9. The Lord's response is not about changing Paul's circumstances (i.e. defeating the opponents); rather, it addresses the immediate context, which is a meditation upon Paul's dangerous oscillation between pride and despair. The word of the Lord is meant to change Paul.

However, it is difficult to assess how the Lord's word functions as a solution to Paul's plight when so many variables remain undefined. The argument in v. 9 alone addresses the sufficiency of God's grace, the relationship between strength and weakness, boasting, and the power of Christ. As a result, I am pausing my interpretation of the passage to survey the major interpreters of strength in weakness and to discern how they understand the key variables of v. 9, especially 12.9-10 as a whole, before providing my

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<sup>790</sup> See e.g. Barrett, *Corinthians*, 316; Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 593; Calvin, *Corinthians*, II: 377.

<sup>791</sup> Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 217.

<sup>792</sup> See p. 212 above.

own interpretation. This is where one enters the rarified air of 2 Corinthians studies, interacting with the few interpreters—especially German scholars—who give detailed theological attention to the strength in weakness paradox. As mentioned previously, there are many treatments of 2 Cor. 12.9-10 which never provide this precision, either by offering generic interpretations<sup>793</sup> or by failing to identify and develop the different (and possibly contradictory) ways that they explain the paradox.<sup>794</sup> A key variable for evaluating those who dig deeper is whether the reading provides a cogent solution to Paul's errant understanding of the relationship between strength and weakness (v. 1-8). Most importantly, it was established earlier that Paul's polarity mirrors the Corinthians' experience of pride and despair (e.g. 2.1-7; 10.10-12). So a satisfactory reading must also show awareness that the Lord's response is more than an apologetic for Paul's ministry—it has direct significance for the Corinthians too.

## *ii. Prevailing Emphases in Interpretation of the Strength in Weakness Paradox*

### *a. Revelatory Interpreters*

Perhaps the most popular interpretation of strength in weakness is the revelatory view. This perspective was first identified by O'Collins, who suggests that it emphasizes the acquisition of divine knowledge—which takes root in the heart (3.3; 5.12)—and thus enables the perception of God's strength in individuals who are outwardly weak.<sup>795</sup> As such, the revelatory view's starting point is the following accusation against Paul: 'For they say, "His letters are weighty [βαρύς] and strong [ισχύς], but his bodily presence is weak [ἀσθενής], and his speech of no account"' (10.10). This causes revelatory interpreters to

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<sup>793</sup> E.g. Black, *Weakness*, 228-247; Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 465-66; Stegman, *Corinthians*, 271-273.

<sup>794</sup> E.g. Calvin, *Corinthians*, II: 377-380; Savage, *Weakness*, 166-167, 177; Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 281, 292-93; Harris, *Corinthians*, 864, 866-67.

<sup>795</sup> O'Collins, 'Weakness', 528-29.

stress that Paul's argument in 12.9-10 is largely—even wholly—a response to the criticism of his weak bodily appearance.<sup>796</sup> Hotze suggests that the main problem in Corinth is the opponents' influence on the community, creating the need for the Fool's Speech where 'Paul reacts, as it were, "egocentrically" to this challenge (11,21b-12,10)'.<sup>797</sup> A classic revelatory reading is offered by Güttgemanns, who held that the opponents were Gnostic agitators who doubt Paul's legitimacy due to his lack of ecstatic experiences and his bodily weakness.<sup>798</sup> Consequently, Paul defends his 'apostolic existence' by arguing that God's strength is most clearly *revealed* in the midst of weakness.<sup>799</sup> In other words, weakness performs a 'hermeneutical function' by making God's work more conspicuous.<sup>800</sup> However, the opponents lack the knowledge to understand the strength that Paul receives from Christ, so they castigate him for his appearance.

Although the revelatory view does not place a particular emphasis on the Lord's proclamation of 'grace [χάρις]' (v. 9a), it is still important for both Güttgemanns and Hotze. The latter argues that the proximity of God's grace and power in v. 9a shows that the two are essentially synonymous—grace is power, and the means by which the paradox is conveyed.<sup>801</sup> This causes Hotze to focus on the first μου in v. 9—a divine possessive—because 'in this way the paradox is not actually explained; but it is referred to the transcendental realm.'<sup>802</sup> Paul's transcendent perspective is, for Hotze, traced to his cross theology in 13.4, where the apostle notes that Jesus was 'crucified in weakness [ἀσθένεια], but lives by the power [δύναμις] of God'. Güttgemanns also emphasizes the transcendent nature of strength in weakness, but he continues to insist that the paradox responds to the

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<sup>796</sup> Revelatory interpreters taking this line of argument include Kruse, *Corinthians*, 207-08 and Belleville, *Corinthians*, 309-10.

<sup>797</sup> Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 172.

<sup>798</sup> Güttgemanns, *Apostel*, 155-56.

<sup>799</sup> *Ibid.*, 165. Also see Schmeller, *Korinther*, II: 309-10.

<sup>800</sup> Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 454. See also Heckel, *Kraft*, 321.

<sup>801</sup> Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 217.

<sup>802</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

Corinthians' claims.<sup>803</sup> Schmeller goes so far as to observe that the passage contains no reference to the cross and is simply a 'divine pedagogy'.<sup>804</sup>

A point of dispute between revelatory interpreters concerns the verb with which the Lord relates strength and weakness: 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect [τελέω] in weakness' (v. 9). Nicdao rightly observes that this verb is important for Barré and Güttgemanns.<sup>805</sup> This is especially so for the latter, who associates it with the Gnostic concept of τελείωσις, a process of spiritual renewal that only occurs in the heavens.<sup>806</sup> The thrust of Paul's argument, then, is that what was formerly transcendent has become immanent—power is perfected in weakness. Others believe that far less can be deduced from τελέω. Schmeller argues that the verb means that power 'increased' in weakness, but the specifics of this relationship are 'not essential'.<sup>807</sup> Other revelatory interpreters, including Hotze, Thrall, and Harvey, do not analyze this verb at all.<sup>808</sup>

The general lack of attention to τελέω (v. 9) underscores once again that the revelatory view is built upon a certain reading of the Corinthian conflict. In light of the claims of the opponents, revelatory interpreters insist that the paradox focuses upon the 'perception of the significance and value of suffering'.<sup>809</sup> Güttgemanns prefers the term 'epiphany', suggesting that strength appears to Paul in the midst of his weaknesses.<sup>810</sup> He approvingly quotes Lietzmann: "'Die menschliche Schwachheit ist gerade der Ort, wo sich Christi Herrlichkeit offenbart, und wo sie allein sichtbar und wirksam ist'".<sup>811</sup> Crucially,

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<sup>803</sup> Güttgemanns, *Herr*, 168.

<sup>804</sup> Schmeller, *Korinther*, II:311.

<sup>805</sup> Nicdao, *Weakness*, 764.

<sup>806</sup> Güttgemanns, *Herr*, 168.

<sup>807</sup> Schmeller, *Korinther*, II:311.

<sup>808</sup> See Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 213-224; Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:820-29; Harvey, *Renewal*, 104-06.

<sup>809</sup> Harvey, *Renewal*, 104.

<sup>810</sup> Güttgemanns, *Apostel*, 170.

<sup>811</sup> *Ibid.*, 168. There is some evidence of the ontological view in this quotation—i.e. the use of *wirksam*—even though Güttgemanns is decidedly on the revelatory side.

Hotze insists that the Lord's power is too transcendent to 'appear concretely', so it must be apprehended by faith in the 'inner man'.<sup>812</sup> This dichotomy between the inner and outer person is crucial for a revelatory understanding of paradox: it allows for the simultaneity of (inner) strength and (outer) weakness.<sup>813</sup> Hotze believes that this reading penetrates the mysteries of paradox by isolating its dimensions: the opponents only see Paul's weakness (10.10), but weakness is—for the initiated—the perfect place to receive divine strength (12.9-10).<sup>814</sup> Consequently, strength in weakness is really a '*Dialektik*' between two points of view.<sup>815</sup> It is noteworthy that this construction is not dissimilar to the Stoic distinction between intention and outward action. As Seneca says, 'So what counts is, not what is done or what is given, but the spirit of the action'.<sup>816</sup> The Stoics likewise attributed honour to terrible events, including suicide, if the act was well-intended.<sup>817</sup>

The remainder of v. 9-10—where Paul talks more concretely about his boasting—is not of particular importance for the revelatory view. The apostle's boasting is labelled by Hotze as 'a "practical", turned "outward" paradox' that is necessary, essentially as a concession, so that the paradox would not become too abstract.<sup>818</sup> For Güttgemanns, Paul's boasting in weakness is crucial for his ongoing dialogue with the opponents. In Paul's boast, the paradox becomes a 'language-event'.<sup>819</sup> Schmeller prefers a broader view, noting the centrality of Paul's boasting to his apostolic ministry. He concludes that 'the strength is added to correct a weakness, which likewise limits [strength]'.<sup>820</sup> In this sense, strength and

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<sup>812</sup> Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 219-220.

<sup>813</sup> Ibid.

<sup>814</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>815</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>816</sup> Seneca *Ben.* 1.6.1.

<sup>817</sup> So Rist, *Stoic*, 233.

<sup>818</sup> Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 218.

<sup>819</sup> Güttgemanns, *Apostel*, 170.

<sup>820</sup> Schmeller, *Korinther*, II:311.

weakness work together to increase Paul's spiritual prowess.<sup>821</sup> Understanding 2 Corinthians to be a defense of the apostle's ministry, Schmeller emphasizes the place of strength in weakness in Paul's work: 'Deshalb steht die Schwachheit, die die Korinther an ihm kennengelernt haben, nicht im Widerspruch zu seinem Anspruch auf Autorität; sie legitimiert diesen Anspruch vielmehr'.<sup>822</sup> So Paul boasts in his weaknesses 'dass die Kraft Gottes, die Paulus zu außergewöhnlichen Missionsleistungen und ekstatischen Erfahrungen verhilft, auch in seiner Schwachheit wirkt und dort besonders deutlich wahrnehmbar ist, weil hier menschliches Vermögen jedenfalls ausscheidet.'<sup>823</sup>

The revelatory view is certainly correct to emphasize that strength in weakness affects one's knowledge and the paradoxical work of God is centered on the inner person. This is essential to Paul's argument against the opponents: they want external glory (10.10; 10.12), but Paul embodies a vision for strength and power that is not outwardly impressive (11.6; 12.6). Consequently, revelatory interpreters are helpful in their focus on the transcendent nature of the Lord's word (v. 9-10). As discussed previously, a transcendent element to strength in weakness is important for the paradox's logical and theological integrity.<sup>824</sup>

Nonetheless, the revelatory view seems inherently limited by its emphasis on knowledge. Güttgemanns narrowly defines Paul's boasting as a language event despite the fact that it must involve concrete behaviours.<sup>825</sup> Meanwhile, Hotze thinks that v. 9b-10 is a concession that adds little to Paul's argument.<sup>826</sup> These assertions are especially problematic in light of the Corinthians' pains created by Paul's previous visit and letter

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<sup>821</sup> Ibid.

<sup>822</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>823</sup> Ibid. It is worth noting that, like Güttgemanns, Schmeller can drift into the ontological view (e.g. II:324-25) even though he largely expresses the revelatory view (see esp. his summary on II:276).

<sup>824</sup> See sec. VII.iii of Ch. 3.

<sup>825</sup> Güttgemanns, *Apostel*, 170.

<sup>826</sup> Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 218.

(2.1-7). Would a cerebral revolution be sufficient to transform the Corinthians' deep-seated suffering? And is it accurate to think that Paul's struggle with despair and conceit (12.1-8)—the immediate context of the Lord's Word (v. 9)—merely requires a better knowledge of God's work in the inner person? Such conclusions seem trite in light of the struggles in Paul's past narrative and the community's ongoing difficulties. In short, the revelatory view is too heavily derived from common readings of the Corinthian conflict where Paul defends his poor appearance.

To be fair, Schmeller considers the ongoing implications of strength in weakness in Paul's life, thus opening the door for a more satisfactory response to Paul's and the Corinthians' polarized situation. But he remains focused on the aid it provides Paul's *apostolic mission* rather than his own life or those of the Corinthians, and the rest of the revelatory camp is not nearly as sensitive to such intricacies. For instance, some interpreters argue that God gave the thorn in the flesh, yet they contradict themselves by insisting that the paradox is the addition of divine power to human weakness.<sup>827</sup> Indeed, the revelatory view appears guilty of treating weakness merely as a *means* to transcendent strength rather than considering carefully how strength and weakness might otherwise relate to one another. This is no more apparent than in the exegesis of *τελέω* (v. 9), a word that receives little, if any, attention from revelatory interpreters. The most telling conclusion comes from Hotze, however, who reduces the paradox to a dialectic between heavenly and earthly perspectives before suggesting that the paradox must be *solved* as opposed to developed and explored.<sup>828</sup> It seems that revelatory interpreters view the paradox as a device that signals an escape from the earthly realm into the world of God's transcendent power. But this is problematic because the paradox must translate into the

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<sup>827</sup> See p. 232, fnt. 783 above.

<sup>828</sup> Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 218-19.

human realm—it is addressed to Paul in the midst of his polarity of strength and weakness, and it is meant to help both him and the Corinthians. In the revelatory reading, it is as though Paul records the words of the Lord (v. 9a), but skips v. 9b-10 where he speaks more about himself in relation to the paradox. This suggests that strength in weakness is fundamentally a transcendent reality that cannot be truly expressed in human terms.

#### b. Ontological Interpreters

The second prevailing viewpoint on strength in weakness is what O'Collins calls the ontological interpretation.<sup>829</sup> It asserts that power *arrives*, not merely *appears*, in the midst of weakness.<sup>830</sup> Best comments, 'Weakness belongs to the human condition, even to the saved human condition, and when accepted permits God's grace to operate.'<sup>831</sup> In this sense, weakness does not hold a hermeneutical function—like the revelatory view—rather, it is a *pre-condition* for the reception of God's strength. This shifts the paradox away from issues of knowledge to the attainment of humility and selflessness. While the revelatory view insists that one receive knowledge of God's work, being most evident in weakness, the ontological view emphasizes the concrete embodiment of weakness as a means to strength. Nonetheless, this is deceptively similar to the revelatory view in the sense that the emphasis rests upon the decrease of human power to enable the operation of God's heavenly work.

Like the revelatory view, ontological interpreters make appeals to the context of 2 Corinthians to support their position.<sup>832</sup> Nicdao points to Crafton, who rightly views Paul's weakness and humility as the distinguishing factor between the apostolic

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<sup>829</sup> O'Collins, 'Weakness', 528-29.

<sup>830</sup> Ibid.

<sup>831</sup> Best, *Corinthians*, 120.

<sup>832</sup> Ibid., 5-6; 118; Lambrecht, 'Sterkte', 276-77.



proclamation and the Corinthian boasting.<sup>833</sup> Paul himself says that the Corinthians are 'without understanding' because 'they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another' (10.12). Meanwhile, Paul does not 'boast beyond limits' (10.13) and poignantly asks, 'who is weak, and I am not weak?' (11.29). The apostle's argument culminates in his boast in weakness rather than a boast in strength, status, or competence (12.10; cf. 3.1, 10.10).

The focus on embodying weakness as a pre-condition to strength means that many ontological interpreters resist viewing strength and weakness as co-existent realities.<sup>834</sup> Instead, the paradox is viewed as a process—a movement from weakness to strength, which is taken by some as a more coherent explanation of the paradox itself. For instance, Lambrecht begins with the premise that 'a paradox should not be understood literally.'<sup>835</sup> Consequently, one must consider what Paul *actually* intends with his paradoxical formulations.<sup>836</sup> This leads to significant engagement with certain aspects of v. 9-10, where Lambrecht argues that the paradox is a component of Paul's everyday life (i.e. 12.7), so it must involve real power as opposed to its mere appearance (e.g. 4.16; 6.1-10).<sup>837</sup> Lambrecht believes that this is confirmed in 13.4, where Paul is weak, though strength will attend his next visit to Corinth, like the timeline of Christ's crucifixion and subsequent resurrection.<sup>838</sup>

These sequential patterns are also detected by Lambrecht in 12.9-10, where Paul appears to follow the same sequence: 'I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so

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<sup>833</sup> Nicdao, *Weakness*, 769.

<sup>834</sup> See e.g. H.K. Nielsen, 'Paulus' Verwendung des Begriffes Dynamis. Eine Replik zur Kreuzestheologie,' in *Die paulinische Literatur und Theologie*, Teologische Studien 7, ed. S. Pedersen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 137-58 [157] and Jervell, 'Schwache', 197.

<sup>835</sup> Lambrecht, 'Sterkte', 274. The Dutch reads: 'aen paradox mag men niet letterlijk verstaan'.

<sup>836</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>837</sup> *Ibid.*, 281-82.

<sup>838</sup> *Ibid.*, 282, 284.

that Christ's power may rest on me' (v. 9b).<sup>839</sup> Concerning v. 9b, Windisch likewise argues, 'Eigenartig ist nun der mit ἵνα angedeutete Kausalverband: der Verzicht auf einen eigenen Wert, das demütige laute Bekenntnis seiner eigenen Ohnmacht ist also die Vorbedingung für das Einziehen dieses himmlischen Wesens in ihn.'<sup>840</sup> The paradox thus becomes the arrival of true power after a period of deep weakness, much like Christ's resurrection. This event did not merely change Christ's knowledge—it worked powerfully to raise him from the grave.

The coming of power is viewed by the ontological camp as the result of God's grace. Following Calvin, many argue that the strength in weakness paradox is specifically a picture of saving grace, especially in light of Paul's own paradoxical conversion and his mission to the Gentiles.<sup>841</sup> Paul knows that an individual must be sufficiently humble and contrite to receive the mercies of God's favour. The coming of such mercies is captured in the meaning of τελέω in v. 9b, which does not refer to an intensification, but the completion of an event.<sup>842</sup> Windisch, for instance, sees this meaning in occurrences of τελέω in John 19.30 and Revelation 10.7.<sup>843</sup> He thus concludes that if power 'wants to have the highest impact', it simply needs to be paired with a weakened body.<sup>844</sup>

The strength of the ontological interpretation is its focus on the human being, highlighting that Paul's experience of strength in weakness requires an attitude of humility beyond the mere appearance of bodily weakness. This is a constant refrain throughout 2 Corinthians (e.g. 3.5; 4.7b; 10.13). These interpreters also rightly see God's power being tangibly present—the Lord responds to weakness and creates solutions that have an impact

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<sup>839</sup> Ibid.

<sup>840</sup> Windisch, *Korintherbrief*, 390-91.

<sup>841</sup> Calvin, *Corinthians*, II: 378-79. Also e.g. Best, *Corinthians*, 120-21; Käsemann, 'Legitimität,' 42; Lambrecht, 'Sterkte', 281.

<sup>842</sup> See the summary of ontological approaches to τελέω in Nicdao, *Weakness*, 772-73.

<sup>843</sup> Windisch, *Korintherbrief*, 391.

<sup>844</sup> Ibid.

upon Paul's daily life (e.g. 1.8-9; 11.30-33). Both tangible humility and power are evident in 12.1-10, where Paul changes his outlook on strength (v. 1-8) and takes up the humble vocation of boasting in his deprivation (v. 9b-10).

However, an ontological reading also encounters serious problems, perhaps even more than those of the revelatory view. It has long been recognized that it denigrates the incongruity of grace, perhaps even possessing a Pelagian impulse, by suggesting that the achievement of humility is the pre-requisite to God's power.<sup>845</sup> Even Lambrecht, who defends the ontological view, believes that weakness *cannot* serve as a pre-requisite to power because it would displace the need for God's grace.<sup>846</sup> This is important within the Corinthian context, as it would be a poor strategy—even a sadistic strategy—for Paul to suggest that what the pained Corinthians need to solve their ills is further penance and contrition!

Like the revelatory emphasis, the ontological viewpoint includes interpreters like Lambrecht who believe that strength in weakness should not be treated paradoxically. But ontological interpreters generally go further than the revelatory view—which treats strength in weakness as a dialectic between the earthly and the heavenly—by flattening the paradox into a process. This may certainly be true of the proto-paradox (e.g. 1.8-11), but it seems to misunderstand the close relation between strength and weakness elsewhere (e.g. 6.8-10) and especially in 12.9-10. Also, how would a weakened Paul and his community benefit from a process that requires them to attain a certain weakness in order to gain power? Is this not counter-productive for the extremely competitive Corinthians?

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<sup>845</sup> See e.g. Heckel, *Kraft*, 104-5 and Carson, *Maturity*, 154-55. For an accusation of Pelagianism, see O'Collins, 'Weakness', 530.

<sup>846</sup> Lambrecht, 'Sterkte', 281.

In summary, the ontological view is almost the opposite of the revelatory view: it focuses on the attitudinal stance of the individual before the transcendent power of God. The revelatory view emphasizes a larger order change that could help the Corinthians (i.e. a new perspective generated by a transcendent reality) while the ontological reading focuses upon the community's personal need of an attitude change (i.e. the Corinthian community needs to be more humble). The differing tendencies of these viewpoints are even more striking in light of the fact that they refer to the same evidence—the letter's background, the use of *τελέω*, the relationship between strength and weakness. In fact, the ontological and revelatory views are deceptively similar in the sense that they place divine power and human weakness in a competitive relationship in which humanity's power decreases and divine power increases. These similarities suggest that the two viewpoints are not mutually exclusive and, as a result, some interpreters have sought to combine them.

### c. Mixed Presentations of Strength in Weakness

A mediating position between the ontological and revelatory emphases was proposed in O'Collins' groundbreaking article concerning the prevailing views of strength in weakness.<sup>847</sup> According to O'Collins, a mediating viewpoint is preferable because neither the ontological nor the revelatory reading is entirely satisfactory in isolation. This line of argument has subsequently been adopted by several interpreters. The key distinction here is that a mixed presentation of the paradox—both ontological and revelatory—does not combine the two approaches; rather, it alternates between them and ultimately views them as complementary perspectives on the same text.

Perhaps the best representative of this viewpoint is Heckel, who is unique in the detail and breadth of his study—he begins by building a Pauline anthropology from

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<sup>847</sup> O'Collins, 'Weakness', 537.

passages outside of 2 Corinthians. The most important among them include 1 Corinthians 1.23-25, Philippians 4.11-13, and 1 Corinthians 2.3-5.<sup>848</sup> In each case, Heckel draws attention to how God's power transcends normative human evaluations of worth and competence.<sup>849</sup> Even God's weakness is 'stronger [ἰσχυρότερος] than humanity's strength' (1 Cor 1.25) and, although Paul knows how to be 'brought low [ταπεινῶω]', he can do 'all things through him who gives me strength [ἐνδυναμῶω]' (Phil 4.12-13). This focus on God's agency seems to influence Heckel's general rejection of the ontological view: an experience of strength in weakness is radically dependent upon grace (cf. v. 9) and not the initiative of human agents—a focus Heckel perceives in the ontological reading.<sup>850</sup> Instead, in 2 Cor. 12.9-10, the grace of God is salvific and thus produces strength because it presents Paul with the hope of eternity.<sup>851</sup>

Heckel offers a brief interpretation of τελέω in v. 9b, suggesting that it has the sense of 'being brought to fruition' because the term is often used for the fulfillment of prayer.<sup>852</sup> Regarding the remainder of v. 9-10, Heckel argues that the ontological view merely reverses the claims of 10.10: weakness becomes the sign of power rather than power itself.<sup>853</sup> Paul, however, wants to 'overcome' this 'contradiction' by showing that the relationship between weakness and power is more complex.<sup>854</sup> The paradox concerns Paul's apostolate, and the key to understanding this office lies in the power and authority given by God (10.8; 13.10), which transcend any claims the opponents make upon him.<sup>855</sup> So when Paul utilizes the terms δύναμις and ἀσθένεια—acting as though his power is found in

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<sup>848</sup> Heckel, *Kraft*, 229-34; 265-71; 292-93.

<sup>849</sup> Ibid.

<sup>850</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>851</sup> Ibid., 274-75.

<sup>852</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>853</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>854</sup> Ibid.

<sup>855</sup> Ibid.

weakness—such paradoxical reasoning is ultimately an *equivocation*.<sup>856</sup> This causes Heckel, like Hotze, to argue that Paul is dealing with two points of view: the human and the divine. When Paul says, 'when I am weak, then I am strong' (v. 10), he is saying that he can be strong and weak at the same time because his inner, spiritual life is secure (a transcendent perspective) amidst his outward weakness (the human perspective).<sup>857</sup> In this sense, the paradox is revelatory, but it is not truly a paradox. Heckel admits that to discover the true meaning of strength in weakness one must ultimately 'dissolve' the paradox.<sup>858</sup> Although Heckel's interpretation leans heavily to the revelatory side, it is also ontological due to a crucial caveat that comes later in his study. Heckel believes that weakness can be a pre-requisite to strength, but *only* in the sense that every Christian must be humble and admit their depravity in order to receive God's grace.<sup>859</sup> As a result, the strength in weakness paradox is a '*polar*': Paul lives in two opposed realities—his human brittleness and the Lord's strength—which are both visibly and tangibly present in his life.<sup>860</sup>

Being very similar to Heckel, Aejmelaesus takes grace to be almost synonymous with power: it is what brings God's relief and rescue in Paul's life.<sup>861</sup> As a result, Paul's request for the thorn's removal is fundamental to strength in weakness. It is not a sign of Paul's desire for strength; rather, it proves that the apostle is sufficiently vulnerable to receive God's strength.<sup>862</sup> This means that God's power is most effective when one relinquishes one's desire for earthly strength (12.9).<sup>863</sup> Consequently, Aejmelaesus suggests that Paul's use of *τελέω* means 'to achieve the greatest possible effectiveness'.<sup>864</sup> But given

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<sup>856</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>857</sup> Ibid., 297.

<sup>858</sup> Ibid., 115-116; 121.

<sup>859</sup> Ibid., 319-24.

<sup>860</sup> Ibid.

<sup>861</sup> Aejmelaesus, *Schwachheit*, 293.

<sup>862</sup> Ibid.

<sup>863</sup> Ibid., 300.

<sup>864</sup> Ibid.

that the effectiveness of God's power—a decidedly ontological perspective—is greatest in the weak, the power also becomes highly visible. This leads Aejmelaesus to conclude that weakness has a 'positive value'.<sup>865</sup> In this sense, Heckel's 'polar' relationship between strength and weakness is 'too simple'.<sup>866</sup> Instead, Paul believes that if he accepts weakness, he is used by Christ to build the church and spread the gospel.<sup>867</sup> So Aejmelaesus differs from Heckel by associating the paradox with Paul's missionary efforts.

Given that Heckel and Aejmelaesus simply alternate between the ontological and revelatory readings, my appraisal of their arguments does not significantly differ from my comments above. While the effort to combine the two perspectives is a welcome decision in light of my criticism that both are too narrow in isolation, their simple alternation still yields a problematic picture of divine and human agency: the two are either somewhat disconnected or even placed in competition with one another. This is most evident in both Heckel's and Aejmelaesus' treatments of the paradox. Heckel wishes to resolve strength in weakness by making it a dialectic between the heavenly and the earthly, whereas Aejmelaesus inverts the normal relationship between strength and weakness by suggesting that the latter possesses a positive value. In each case, there is no clear sense of congruence between strength and weakness, which, in their view, represent the divine and human spheres. This reasoning is especially evident in Heckel's work, where he suggests that the strength in weakness paradox is an equivocation. Such a conclusion is surprising given that Paul places so much weight on this construction (e.g. 1.8-11; 4.7-15). Indeed it seems that in Heckel, as in other interpreters above, the analysis of the paradox may be based more on the limits of his argument's internal logic than on what the text of 12.9-10 actually says!

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<sup>865</sup> Ibid., 305.

<sup>866</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>867</sup> Ibid., 319-21.

Consequently, in what follows, I provide my own reading of 2 Cor. 12.9-10 where I aim to develop a more satisfactory view of how the revelatory and ontological elements of Paul's argument fit together. In particular, I aim to give a robust treatment of the strength in weakness paradox which preserves its value *as paradox* so that, rather than resolving it, one might see why Paul chose to employ this unique theological construct in the first place, especially as it concerns the Corinthians' struggle with pains.

#### IV. A Transformative Reading of Strength in Weakness

##### *i. The Creative Sufficiency of God's Intrusive Grace (v. 9a)*

A transformative reading of the strength in weakness paradox begins with God's grace. The Lord's first word to Paul is that his 'grace [χάρις]' is 'sufficient [ἀρκέω]' (v. 9). Given that Paul is caught in a polarity of strength or weakness, this grace can only be sufficient if it has far more to give than power: it changes the very relationship between strength and weakness. Paul implies that this is necessary when he acknowledges his possession of both strength (v. 1-6) and weakness (v. 7), yet he is still lacking in contentment and peace (v. 8). There needs to be a change within him. At first, this seems to favour the interpretation that grace is salvific in v. 9a.<sup>868</sup> But this discourse is not a conversion narrative. Paul's struggles persist even as he recognizes his identification with Christ: he asks for the Lord's help (v. 7), he goes to the third heaven (v. 2), and he is confident in his gospel (11.4). A key to understanding grace here is the inherently transformative nature of χάρις.<sup>869</sup> Paul elsewhere uses this term to express the relief given in his suffering (e.g. Phil. 1.7). In 2 Cor. 12.9-10, God's grace meets Paul especially in his weakness—the immediate context of the discourse (v. 7-8). In order to change Paul's

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<sup>868</sup> So Schmeller, *Korinther*, II:309-310; cf. Stegman, *Corinthians*, 271. For others adhering to this view, see p. 245, ftnt. 842 above.

<sup>869</sup> See e.g. the discussion on p. 231-32.



experience, this grace will bring power, but it must also be sufficiently conformed to the recipient. God's grace does not overwhelm or alienate Paul in his weakness—it does not remove his infirmities—rather, it enables him to 'boast in his weakness' (v. 9b). What Paul needs is a better grasp of the relationship between strength and weakness. Until then, he is unstable, constantly moving between honour and shame, pride and despair. Like the Corinthians, he desperately seeks the Lord's strength while wishing away his personal weakness—a recipe for instability and disappointment.

The precise nature of God's grace is significant to Heckel, who focuses his view of the paradox on this issue. He rejects ontological readings because they do not satisfy God's grace, which is the focus of Paul's expression of contentment (v. 10).<sup>870</sup> But Heckel never becomes more specific about the nature of grace, instead emphasizing that it is generally helpful because it brings power and reminds the Corinthians of their eternal destiny.<sup>871</sup> A key factor in Heckel's interpretation is that he reads the paradox in light of other Pauline passages (e.g. Rom. 5)—a strategy that builds a biblical theology, but does less for the specifics of the Corinthian context.<sup>872</sup> One must recall that Paul has pleaded for the thorn's removal (v. 8): he stands utterly helpless before the Lord. So an important characteristic of this grace is its *incongruity*.<sup>873</sup> Furthermore, the desperate nature of Paul's situation, coupled with the Lord's sufficiency (v. 9a), suggest that this grace possesses a certain *efficacy*.<sup>874</sup> It is going to have a pragmatic effect upon Paul's life because he can afford nothing less.

But the nature of the gift in v. 9a is not fully perceived until one considers the dramatic shift that occurs between v. 8 and v. 9: the grace of God enters Paul's life when he

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<sup>870</sup> Heckel, *Kraft*, 320-321.

<sup>871</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>872</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>873</sup> For more on the use of this term with respect to grace in Paul, see Barclay, *Gift*, 72-3.

<sup>874</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74.

did not ask for it. Paul exhorts the Lord for the removal of the thorn, but the Lord does not honour his request. Instead, he sends grace. This is not the answer that Paul was looking for; it is the answer that God provides. Yet this dynamic is only mildly perceived by scholars such as Nicdao and Hotze.<sup>875</sup> Plummer is representative when he acknowledges that Paul's request is 'refused', but he then says nothing of the implications.<sup>876</sup> This produces difficulties in their interpretation of the paradox, as though it is simply a more comfortable relationship between Paul's thorn (his weakness) and his visions (his strength). But the gap between Paul's request (v. 9a)—and all that precedes the request (v. 1-8)—and the Lord's grace (v. 9b) suggests that the apostle's former experiences of strength and weakness are being left behind. Barrett moves in the right direction by noting Calvin's distinction between means and ends: God will honour Paul's *end* in prayer, yet he is not going to use his desired *means*.<sup>877</sup> But to suggest that God ultimately answers Paul's prayer for the thorn's removal is not radical enough. In light of its incongruity and efficacy, the focus of grace in v. 9a is its creative power. God sends a gift that is sufficient for Paul because it builds amidst desolation, creates life in death. This is why I call it 'intrusive' grace: the Lord is going to offer a solution to Paul's polarity which he cannot possibly envision himself.

*ii. Christ Speaks: Defining the Interdependence of Strength and Weakness (v. 9a)*

The second clause in the *Herrnwort* is perhaps the most important: 'my grace is sufficient for you, for my [μου] power is perfected [τελέω] in weakness [ἀσθένεια]' (v. 9a). Here Paul provides a more precise description of the relationship between strength and weakness, where he notably places an emphasis on power—by referring to it first—before

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<sup>875</sup> Nicdao, *Weakness*, 610.

<sup>876</sup> Plummer, *Corinthians*, 354.

<sup>877</sup> Barrett, *Corinthians*, 316.

mentioning that it is paired with weakness. This confirms my proposal that Paul adjusts his strategy throughout 2 Corinthians 10-13 to focus upon the Corinthians' wrongful pursuit of strength rather than their polarized experience of weakness (cf. 1.8-11; 6.11-13).<sup>878</sup> But the focus of most interpreters is the divine source of the power.<sup>879</sup> Given his recent description of the thorn, the weakness in question appears to be Paul's. Hotze provides a representative interpretation when he assigns weakness to the human realm and strength to the divine.<sup>880</sup>

However, Paul's insertion of the divine voice does not mean that he offers a simple contrast to his weaknesses. The irony of Hotze's interpretation—and many others—is that, although they view the thorn as a God-given weakness, they contradict themselves by claiming that v. 9a expresses the addition of God's strength to human weakness when a *divine* weakness has already been given to Paul.<sup>881</sup> Whatever occurs in v. 9a is more complex than the entry of power into human weakness. This is confirmed by the polar fruits of Paul's life in v. 1-8: conceit and despair. The coming of strength alone, producing more conceit in Paul, cannot fix his predisposition to pride nor relieve a despair gained in an unquenchable pursuit of strength.

The need for an adjustment in the interpretation of 12.9a leads to a re-consideration of the divine power present in weakness. Why does Paul emphasize this (v. 9b)? As discussed above, the suggestion typically made by interpreters concerns its rhetorical function: the presence of divine power denies the claims of the opponents that Paul has no strength (10.10). To the contrary, Paul has access to God's strength! This is certainly a persuasive explanation, but there is an alternative which is actually more suited to the immediate context. One must recall that the *Herrnwort* is the Lord's response, not

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<sup>878</sup> See p. 206-13 above.

<sup>879</sup> See p. 235-36 above. Also see e.g. Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 449 and Martin, *Corinthians*, 419-20.

<sup>880</sup> Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 225. Also see Best, *Corinthians*, 121.

<sup>881</sup> See p. 231-233 above.

primarily to the opponents' claims, but to Paul's past narrative of polarized behaviour (v. 1-8). His visions produced the wrong kind of strength, one which led to 'conceit' (v. 7a). So the function of Paul's emphasis on divine power is to distinguish the *kind* of strength that he receives, not in distinction from the opponents so much as in distinction from his former self. It is not Paul's self-focused, wrongful strength that is proclaimed, but the existence of a different strength—one that comes from God. Although some interpreters fail to understand this, preferring to see strength as something that Paul already possessed in his revelations, the majority rightly assign δύναμις to the Lord.<sup>882</sup> What most interpreters fail to grasp, however, is once more the implication of the divine passive with respect to Paul's thorn. When the Lord proclaims his strength in the midst of weakness, this latter category is also divinely given. In other words, God is on both sides of the paradox—the strength and the weakness. The paradox is not a divine addition to human weakness, but a set of realities brought together by God. In this sense, the revelatory view rightly emphasizes the transcendence of God in the paradox. But it does not fully grasp his transcendence: God is bringing together strength *and* weakness—two opposites—in a transaction that could not be imagined from a human perspective alone. Crucially, the Lord does not indicate whether these entities concern knowledge and appearance or the actual coming of power. He simply refers to δύναμις and ἀσθένεια in an unqualified manner, suggesting that they represent the broadest possible concepts.<sup>883</sup>

To push deeper into the significance of the strength and weakness categories, one has to consider who speaks them into Paul's life. The apostle prays to the κύριος (v. 8), and the third person form of λέγω (v. 9a) confirms that this same Lord responds. Whether this

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<sup>882</sup> See p. 235-36 above.

<sup>883</sup> As argued in sec. IV.i of Ch. 2.

is auditory or not, occurring in a vision or simply through prayer, Paul is not explicit.<sup>884</sup> The main question concerns the identity of the Lord: is the apostle referring to God generally or, more specifically, to Christ? A majority of interpreters suggest that it is Christ who expresses the paradox of strength in weakness, and there is little reason to doubt this conclusion.<sup>885</sup> Paul frequently uses κύριος as a title for Christ (e.g. Rom. 1.4; 1 Cor. 1.10), who is also the source of the paradox elsewhere in 2 Corinthians (e.g. 1.8-11; 13.4). Nonetheless, interpreters generally fail to grasp the implications of this identification. The apostle is revealing more clearly than ever where the paradox originates—he did not invent it, it is not a result of Schmeller's 'godly pedagogy', nor is there a developed course of reasoning from the Christ event to Paul's life.<sup>886</sup> The Lord's word suggests that the paradox is the fruit of Jesus's self-interpretation. Having suffered weakness on the cross, and receiving resurrection power, Christ indicates to Paul that he is the arbiter of a new way of relating strength to weakness (12.9; 13.4). Most importantly, Paul has regularly seen in Jesus a model of outward-focused vulnerability (e.g. 4.12; 5.14-15; 10.1), suggesting that his invocation of Christ foreshadows the achievement of a transformation: a movement from inward-focused despair and pride (v. 1-8) to an other-oriented life that persists amidst weakness. But the achievement of any personal transformation must rest, for the time being, in the intricacies of the Lord's proclamation to Paul.

The precise nature of relations between strength and weakness largely rests on the Lord's use of τελέω: 'for my [μου] power is perfected [τελέω] in weakness [ἀσθένεια]' (v. 9b). This verb is consistently commented upon, although very few consider its meaning closely. Heckel recognizes that the verb means 'zur Vollendung kommen' yet he reduces its

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<sup>884</sup> Cf. the speculation in e.g. Thrall, *Corinthians* II:820 and Harris, *Corinthians*, 862.

<sup>885</sup> E.g. Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:820, Plummer, *Corinthians*, 353, Windisch, *Korintherbrief*, 388; Martin, *Corinthians*, 419.

<sup>886</sup> Schmeller, *Korinther*, II:311. On the latter view, see Harris, *Corinthians*, 862.

meaning to the 'Wirksamkeit' of power in contexts of weakness.<sup>887</sup> Schmeller deems the nuances of the term 'nicht wesentlich'.<sup>888</sup> Nicdao offers perhaps the most complete study, revealing that this verb can mean to carry forward, realize, or complete something.<sup>889</sup> Paul elsewhere uses the term three times: Rom. 2.27; Gal. 5.16; Rom. 13.6. In the latter, Nicdao correctly comments, 'the payment of taxes somehow realizes or brings about the tax revenues.'<sup>890</sup> This suggests that τελέω causes its subject and object to mutually qualify one another—e.g. divine power is not simply acted upon by weakness, but *perfected* or *completed* by it. But like others, Nicdao overlooks this unique function of the verb and focuses on the *temporal* nature of the relationship between strength and weakness.<sup>891</sup> He fails to note that τελέω can express a causal, even ontological, connection between two entities. This is best perceived in Galatians 5.16, where Paul hopes that the Galatians will not 'gratify [τελέσητε] the desires of the flesh.' According to Paul, an act of impurity or sorcery would complete the desires of the flesh (v. 19); but in the same way, the desires of the flesh only have existential meaning in tangible acts of sorcery or impurity. This suggests that there is a sense of interdependence between acts of sorcery and the broader category of works of the flesh. Although strength and weakness are equal categories—unlike those in Galatians 5—Paul seems to articulate a similar relationship, where weakness completes strength and *vice versa*. In other words, an articulation of co-inherence is in view: Paul currently exists in a polarity of strength or weakness—as though one can find strength apart from weakness—but the Lord is saying that it is precisely in weakness that he will find strength. This is underlined by the Lord's use of ἐν (v. 9a),

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<sup>887</sup> Heckel, *Kraft*, 93.

<sup>888</sup> Schmeller, *Korinther*, II:311. His only analysis of the term, already brief, is placed in fine print as opposed to normal typeface.

<sup>889</sup> Nicdao, *Weakness*, 831-32.

<sup>890</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>891</sup> *Ibid.*, 834.

which signals that the perfecting of strength occurs in moments of weakness.<sup>892</sup> So the construction satisfies my criteria for a formal paradox: this is not a value inversion nor mere co-existence; rather, it is a co-inherent relationship where two opposed entities are simultaneously true and paired in such a way that they mutually qualify one another.<sup>893</sup>

The significance of this paradoxical relationship emerges as one considers the context of 12.9-10, where Paul's former narrative is defined by a polarity. He oscillates back and forth between strength and weakness, which is why a contrast would ultimately be unhelpful.<sup>894</sup> Paul needs access to strength, and more than this, he needs to be freed from the inhibition that weakness is a worthless experience. The paradox does precisely this by giving strength *while* affirming the place of weakness in the Christian life—without going so far as to say that weakness is, in isolation, good. This is essential because Paul, of all people, knew the inevitability of weakness, not least because he is presently experiencing the heartbreak caused by his rebellious community (e.g. 2.1-7). But in the midst of the deepest possible pain, Christ comes to Paul and tells him that he does not need to be desperate and strive for strength (cf. 12.1-8); instead Christ outlines a new pathway forward that makes use of the apostle's present trauma and thus avoids the instability of the polarity. Christ treats Paul better than he treats himself. The apostle has the perfect foundation to build a *coherent* life with the *co-inherence* of strength and weakness. The questions that remain are: how, precisely does the paradox help to achieve this? And how might Paul relate all of this to the Corinthians?

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<sup>892</sup> So Harris, *Corinthians*, 864. However, this preposition is widely overlooked. For another locative use of ἐν ('in the midst of...') which signals a paradox, see 2 Cor. 4.7a.

<sup>893</sup> See VII.i-iii of Ch. 3.

<sup>894</sup> So Schmeller, *Korinther*, II:317.

iii. *Transformative Results: Co-inherent Rebound and Synergistic Fruit (v. 9b)*

The next sentence reverts to Paul's voice, where he begins v. 9b with οὐ̃ν. Paul is reasoning from the word of the Lord—the strength in weakness paradox—to the results. This insight is rarely noticed by interpreters, who prefer to focus on the content of v. 9b rather than beginning with the connection to v. 9a and its ramifications.<sup>895</sup> In fact, Aejmelaesus does not even comment on the οὐ̃ν.<sup>896</sup> But with this little word, the foundations of Paul's polarity begin to crumble. It signals that Paul grasps the meaning of the *Herrnwort*—that the paradox is intelligible as paradox—and that knowledge is being conveyed, concepts are being delivered. Of primary importance is the change this paradox would have produced in Paul's theology. He learns that Christ is not with the powerful, but with the weak; not with the competent, but with the incompetent. Yet Christ does not simply move the desperate Paul into a position of strength. He goes a step further by giving strength amidst Paul's weakness, which is a truly paradoxical proposal. Of course, the apostle's account of his past narrative (v. 1-9a) obscures the fact that he already understands this paradox. Paul's argument holds far more implications for the Corinthians who, in light of their interest in a Jesus of pure power (cf. 11.4), would have been confounded by a Jesus who contentedly operates his power in Paul's weakness.<sup>897</sup> The apostle's implicit interest in the Corinthians is underlined by his decision to describe his emotions. He expresses his boast with ἡδιστα (v. 9b)—'I will boast all the more gladly [ἡδιστα] of my weaknesses'. This term is an antonym of λύπη,<sup>898</sup> thus forging a link between Paul's storyline and the conflict in Corinth. Like other passages (e.g. 1.3-7; 6.11-

<sup>895</sup> E.g. Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 595; Bultmann, *Corinthians*, 227; Harris, *Corinthians*, 866.

<sup>896</sup> Aejmelaesus, *Schwachheit*, 303-308.

<sup>897</sup> See IV.ii of Ch. 2 for more on the Corinthians' Christology.

<sup>898</sup> See e.g. 'ἡδέως' (BDAG, 3rd ed.), 434; Mk 6.20 and 2 Cor. 11.19. The latter instance is particularly significant as it immediately precedes Paul's description of the opponents' abusive behaviour. The combined result of these verses is a double irony: the Corinthians rejoice in the opponents (11.19)—but are pained by Paul (2.1-7)—even though the ones in whom they rejoice are striking them in the face (v. 20).



13), Paul suggests that if the Corinthians were to experience the paradox they would receive a deep change in their emotions. As for Paul, this is already a reality—his antidote to λύπη is a God-given experience of gladness that results from the paradox's injection of strength (cf. 7.4).

Paul's initial trajectory of transformation is completed when he names the object of his boast: 'my weaknesses [ἀσθενείαι]' (v. 9b). This is typically interpreted as a rhetorical reversal, particularly with respect to the Corinthians' claims against Paul. The opponents boast in their strength, but Paul knows that real strength is found in weak people depending on the Lord. Both Heckel and Nicdao assert that Paul's boasting in weakness is simply an expression of the sufficiency of God's grace.<sup>899</sup> While Paul's boast certainly flows from God's grace, one needs to recall that boasting in antiquity was done to draw attention to one's strengths—it was inherently self-centered and proud.<sup>900</sup> Paul's boast, however, is ironic. He uses the verb καυχάομαι, yet the content of this boasting is ἀσθένεια. The combination of strength (i.e. boasting) and weakness suggests that Paul's boasting is a *synergistic fruit*: the behavioural embodiment of the co-inherence of strength and weakness. Similar synergisms are found earlier in Paul's argument (e.g. 6.8-10), but never has one been represented so clearly. The significance of this view of the boast is that it increases the comprehensive nature of Paul's transformation to the point that his actions become reflections of the paradox. Paul is not simply rejecting the opponents' position that he lacks strength—though he is; he is modeling changes in his overall attitude and behaviour as a result of God's intrusive grace.

The next clause continues to a surprising conclusion: Paul boasts in his weaknesses 'so that the power of Christ [δύναμις τοῦ Χριστοῦ] may rest [ἐπισκηνώω] on me' (v. 9b).

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<sup>899</sup> Nicdao, *Weakness*, 603; Heckel, *Kraft*, 88.

<sup>900</sup> See p. 217-19 above.

The preference of many exegetes is to adopt the ontological view here.<sup>901</sup> Paul is humbling himself, and it seems that as a result of this process, he receives Christ's power. Even those who generally resist the ontological view envision a temporal gap in Paul's reception of strength. So Heckel: 'Für das Wirksam werden der Kraft Christi stellt die Schwachheit deshalb keine zu erfüllende Vorbedingung im konditionalen Sinn dar, sondern allenfalls einen Anlaß oder eine Voraussetzung in zeitlicher Hinsicht, was die temporale Korrelation wenn-dann in v. 10b bestätigt.'<sup>902</sup> One might insist that the sense of sequence is aided by the apparent contrast between human weakness and the power of Christ: Paul must decrease before Christ can increase in his life. But the apostle's use of ἐπισκηνόω (v. 9b) denies this explanation. This term refers to resting or covering, suggesting that the reception of power is not the overwhelming of the human sphere.<sup>903</sup> It rests upon Paul, influencing him, and ultimately changing him. Notably, the apostle's use of ἐπισκηνόω is typically interpreted metaphorically to refer to the presence of God at the Tabernacle due to etymological similarities between the term and the Hebrew שֹׁכֵן.<sup>904</sup> But this metaphor expresses more than presence—the Tabernacle theophany was attended by cloud and fire (e.g. Ex. 40.34-8). In other words, it was inherently ontological *and* revelatory. The metaphor suggests what was already becoming clear: Paul is not simply elucidating a revelatory or ontological paradox because these categories are too narrow. He holds a wider concern that envelops both viewpoints, that is, to elucidate a comprehensive, transformative engagement that drives the Corinthians deeper into the heart of Christ. This Christ—the God-man who was crucified and resurrected (2 Cor. 13.4)—would not boast in pure power or even power that surprisingly arrives after weakness. The resurrection was

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<sup>901</sup> See e.g. Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 451-52 and Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 594-95.

<sup>902</sup> Heckel, *Kraft*, 105.

<sup>903</sup> See the discussion of this verb in e.g. Harris, *Corinthians*, 865-66 and Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:828-29. Also see 'ἐπισκηνόω' (BDAG, 3rd ed.), 378.

<sup>904</sup> See e.g. Martin, *Corinthians*, 421; Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:827; Barrett, *Corinthians*, 317.

impossible without the crucifixion, and any boast must recognize this necessary link. Paul embodies the Christ-like boast by making weakness the object of his boast, and in doing this, it conditions his strength that produced conceit (v. 1-6). The Lord's power (v. 9c) only arrives amidst a boast in weakness (v. 9b) so that Paul will not become unwieldy and arrogant.<sup>905</sup> One must recall that strength is perfected in weakness, not after it. But how then does one respond to the apparent sequence in v. 9b-c (i.e. ἰνα)?

I propose that an alternative explanation for v. 9b can be found within the co-inherent model of the paradox. The concept of co-inherence is helpful because existing models of paradox are not sufficiently nuanced to envision sequence *and* simultaneity. When Paul indicates that he boasts of his weaknesses to bring about God's power, interpreters are forced into an unnecessary dichotomy: Paul must be referring to either a process or a simultaneous event.<sup>906</sup> With the co-inherent model of paradox, however, there is a sense of congruity between the opposites of strength and weakness. When Paul signifies that he is boasting in weakness, the Lord's strength is *activated* by its paradoxical tie with weakness. This means that whenever Paul cites his weakness, strength is simultaneously present too. But he can initially appeal to only one of them—in this case, boasting in weakness—because the two entities are not conflated. This is what I call *co-inherent rebound*: when Paul boasts of his weakness, the Lord's strength simultaneously reverberates back to him. This remains consistent with Paul's use of ἰνα in v. 9b, which could be taken to indicate a temporal gap between weakness and the coming of strength.

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<sup>905</sup> Similarly, Schmeller, *Korinther*, II:311, although he does not develop the paradox conceptually in order to support this claim.

<sup>906</sup> See e.g. Martin, *Corinthians*, 421-22 and Heckel, *Kraft*, 104. Thrall recognizes the apparent dichotomy between sequence and simultaneity (*Corinthians*, II:826) before suggesting that the revelatory view overcomes this by insisting that divine power becomes only more *visible* after the boast, and was thus present all along. But this interpretation is not explicit in the text, and in order to sustain this reading, revelatory interpreters need to develop a more robust concept of how strength is consistently 'resting' in human weakness (beyond a dialectic between the earthly and heavenly, which tends to abolish the human viewpoint, cf. p. 237-243 above).

But the term ἰνα does not typically hold temporal significance.<sup>907</sup> It is acting causatively: Paul boasts in weaknesses, with the result that he receives strength. In other words, the result is simultaneous, yet it is still the result of embracing a prior, independent entity. As the community accuses Paul of weakness, he holds a profound solution: he embraces weakness and in doing so he receives the Lord's strength. He is like Luther who, at the sealing of his daughter's coffin, is able to say: 'Hammer away! On doomsday she will rise again!'<sup>908</sup> In the strength in weakness paradox, one calls attention to weakness and immediately, within that act, receives God's strength.

The implications of this arrangement above are immense: Paul has already shown a change in his attitude, emotions, and behaviour, but the emphasis here rests on the arrival of endurance. Paul's boast in weakness recalls the Corinthians' own interest in power and the accusations made against the apostle regarding his weaknesses (10.10). If Paul remained the person he was prior to the paradox, cowering at the thorn (12.7), these accusations would have saturated him in shame and fear. Instead, the Corinthian accusations are entirely ineffectual, for the reminder of Paul's weakness is merely the harbinger of Christ's strength. Paul is able to continue ministering, to push through the jeering of his enemies because the paradox is sufficiently nuanced to continue giving strength even as an outside party (10.10), sometimes including Paul himself (12.9), continually draws attention to his weaknesses.

#### *iv. The Paradox's Stabilizing Effect (v. 10)*

After the dense argument of v. 9b, Paul progresses to a proclamation of the various ways in which he is content. He says, 'For the sake of Christ, then, I am very content

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<sup>907</sup> See e.g. Rom. 3.8; 1 Cor. 3.18; Gal. 6.12.

<sup>908</sup> WA TR 5:193-94.

[ἐνδουλέω] with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak [ἀσθενέω], then I am strong [δυνατός]' (v. 10). Although it is rarely, if at all, observed by interpreters, there is a shift here from referring to Christ's strength to Paul's.<sup>909</sup> This long transition to the human realm, beginning in v. 9b, is perhaps the clearest sign in v. 9-10 that the paradox possesses a transformative function. The new relationship between strength and weakness announced by Christ in v. 9a is the central, transformative truth and, since that point, Paul has been tracing its impact upon his knowledge, emotions, and behaviour. At this juncture, he becomes intensely *personal*—it is his weakness and strength to which he now refers.<sup>910</sup> He makes an unqualified statement: 'when *I* am weak, then *I* am strong' (v. 10b) (italics mine). Paul does not limit the influence of weakness or strength upon his life, nor does he say that it is when he is outwardly weak that he is inwardly strong. More importantly, the apostle's focus on the human realm—the emphasis of the ontological view—can hardly be reduced to the attainment of humility. His unqualified statement about strength and weakness runs deeper than the ontological view, representing the paradox's transformation of his whole person. The apostle experiences a *synergism* of strength in weakness created by the *monergism* of God's grace: the paradox was forged by God, and now it is absorbing Paul's old strength and weakness to create a paradoxical blend of opposites in his life. This is noted by the apostle's use of ὅταν in v. 10b: it is *whenever* Paul is weak that he is also strong. There is a significant element of simultaneity here, although the two opposites are so tied together by the succinct pairing that each entity clearly qualifies the other.<sup>911</sup> But to what effect?

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<sup>909</sup> See e.g. Stegman, *Corinthians*, 272-73; Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 465-66; Harris, *Corinthians*, 867-68.

<sup>910</sup> By saying that Christ's paradox becomes Paul's, I am not suggesting that the apostle attains the same essence as Christ nor even the same magnitude of power. I am simply observing that, in a tangible sense, Paul receives the paradox and consequently the Lord works all the more within him.

<sup>911</sup> I.e. if Paul is weak when he is strong, it is impossible not to read one entity in light of the other.

The γάρ in v. 10b dictates that Paul's paradoxical conclusion is the theological foundation for what precedes in v. 10a: his declaration of being 'very content [εὐδοκέω]' with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. The cause for this focus on various weaknesses is often traced to the opponents' claims about Paul.<sup>912</sup> But the apostle's concern may also be viewed through the lens of his polarity. Previously, he wanted only strength; on receiving the thorn in the flesh, Paul panicked. But now, he is comfortable with weakness, even content with it—the term εὐδοκέω refers to great delight and satisfaction.<sup>913</sup> In other words, Paul is suggesting that the strength in weakness paradox stabilizes his attitude toward hardship. There has been a complete reversal in his life. He neither evades weakness, nor seeks it, he simply embraces it. This is the personal transformation that occurs when one learns that strength and weakness co-inhere in the Lord. It is ironic that so much ink has been spilled on Paul's varying personal pronouns—which have no direct bearing upon the *meaning* of the letter—when the unscrutinized first person verbs in v. 9-10 lay bare the open secret of 2 Corinthians: Paul's experience of strength in weakness brings personal transformation. However, it is absolutely critical to note that this transformation is not intended for Paul alone. The apostle has repeatedly signalled that his experience of strength in weakness is paradigmatic for the Corinthians (e.g. 1.3-7; 6.3-13), and he is about to explicitly address them (12.11ff). This is not to mention the inherent relevance of Paul's discourse on strength in weakness for a community that is struggling with pain (2.1-7), which is a kind of weakness.<sup>914</sup> The community is especially in view here given Paul's declaration that he is content—precisely what the Corinthians are not. The apostle is showing that, as a result of the paradox, he embodies a state that is coveted by the Corinthians. But like the apostle, the community

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<sup>912</sup> See p. 212 above.

<sup>913</sup> See e.g. Rom. 15.26-7; 1 Cor. 1.21; Gal. 1.15. Also see 'εὐδοκέω', (BDAG, 3rd ed.), 404.

<sup>914</sup> See sec. IV.i of Ch. 2.

must experience the work of the God-man who translates God's transcendent power into the human realm (12.9a), where the paradox can permeate one's life and thus change one's perception of the world, of one's self, even of one's sworn enemies (v. 6b; cf. 10.10).

Calvin tries to capture the pastoral implications of 12.9b with the illustration of a mountain and a valley: you must become low to receive the rain of God's heavenly grace.<sup>915</sup> While this is certainly a beautiful image, it does not quite capture Paul's emphasis in v. 10 because it is a thoroughgoing ontological interpretation. Paul has actually spent much of the material advising the Corinthians not to hide in the valleys *or* run up the mountains—their polarity—because such experiences of naked strength and weakness are destroying them (e.g. 2.1-7; 6.11-13; 10.10; 11.18-21). Instead, he insists that Christ makes low the mountains and raises up the valleys to place the community on a broad plateau, where they will be not too high and not too low. Paul and the Corinthians can be content with weaknesses, because when they are weak, they are immediately given strength; when they are dishonoured, they are immediately honoured; when they are low, they are immediately lifted up (v. 10). The paradox displaces their spasmodic behaviour in favour of a self-understanding centered on the Lord who allows their strengths and weaknesses to qualify and so improve one another.

*v. The Growth of Human Potential and Ticiati's Augustinian Rules*

It should now be evident that there is a fundamental divergence between the transformative reading of strength in weakness and prevailing readings, whether revelatory, ontological or mixed. As noted previously, the revelatory view favours the divine sphere by arguing that transcendent power is evident in human weakness when one adopts a heavenly point of view. While the ontological view distinctively stresses the

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<sup>915</sup> Calvin, *Corinthians*, II:378-79.

human achievement of humility, it is deceptively similar to the revelatory view in that humanity must shrink back to allow for the arrival of divine power. This means that both views place God and humanity in a *competitive* relationship—one must decrease for the other to increase. Of course, interpreters choose humanity as the side that needs to decrease, leading the majority of the field to interpret the paradox as some sort of emphasis on Paul's weakness or the overcoming of weakness in divine power.<sup>916</sup> These readings would be justifiable if interpreters specified that they are trying to capture the emphasis of Paul's rhetoric, which is clearly shaped by the accusations against his weak appearance and speech (e.g. 10.10; 11.5). But these interpreters are clearly also making *theological claims*. This is no more evident than in Gorman, who frequently interprets the paradox as a kenotic reality in which the participant embodies Christ's self-emptying weakness.<sup>917</sup> The achievement of the paradox is human 'powerlessness'.<sup>918</sup> To be fair, Paul does emphasize an incongruity between God and humanity in 2 Corinthians using *non-paradoxical statements* (e.g. 3.5; 4.7b). I have likewise emphasized that Paul envisions a pragmatic difference between God and humanity, where Paul and the Corinthians are utterly helpless without divine intervention (e.g. 1.8-9; 12.8). What interpreters have failed to appreciate is that this is not the paradox itself. In order for the paradox to remain logically and theologically sound, even Paul's weaknesses must be viewed as divinely-bestowed realities that can only descend to humanity through Christ.<sup>919</sup> In this sense, the paradox does not emphasize a divide between God and humanity—although Paul discusses this elsewhere<sup>920</sup>—so much as it lessens the gap between the two. It makes the participant more

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<sup>916</sup> See e.g. Lambrecht, 'Sterkte', 284-285; Black, *Weakness*, 239; Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 219-225; Savage, *Weakness*, 177-178; Schmeller, *Korinther II*:324.

<sup>917</sup> Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 88-92; 300. See also Gorman, *Inhabiting*, 121.

<sup>918</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>919</sup> See sec. VII.iii of Ch. 3.

<sup>920</sup> See especially p. 286ff below, where I discuss personal faith and its connection to the paradox.



like Christ, thus increasing their capacity to live in weakness. Therefore, a distinctive feature of the paradox's transformative function is *the growth of human potential*.

An emphasis on the paradox's ability to transform humanity in a non-kenotic sense is important for 2 Corinthians given the community's situation and the link I have established between their pain and Paul's experience of weakness. Far from being Paul's personal vendetta, the strength in weakness paradox speaks to a pandemic of pain in Corinth that has affected both Paul and the community (e.g. 2.1-7; 7.5-16). This emotive problem holds disastrous consequences, throwing the community into experiences of shame and depression which—in their honour/shame context—drive them into a hopeless polarity in which they oscillate between weakness and thinly-veiled claims to strength.<sup>921</sup> It would be sadistic, even wildly irresponsible, for the leader of their congregation to suggest that their powerlessness is good, being what is necessary to be more like Christ. Paul is not this kind of pastor, and he argues that by God's grace the Corinthians can receive strength simultaneously in their weakness, which redeems their struggles and thus enables them to find gladness, endurance, even a boast in weakness (12.9-10). Most of all, this wonderful transaction actually allows Christ's power to become theirs (v. 10b).

One might object that my reading of strength in weakness, with its emphasis on human transformation, is a betrayal of Paul's argument—as though the Corinthians can simply continue their pursuit of strength and become what Luther called a 'theologian of glory'.<sup>922</sup> But one must recall that although the Corinthians would grow due to the paradox, this is a deeply paradoxical growth. Instead of envisioning weakness totally separate from strength, it is necessary for the Corinthians to emerge from their polarity—weakness is a concrete part of the Christian life (e.g. 4.12; 11.29). But far from being good in isolation, it

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<sup>921</sup> See sec. IV.ii of Ch. 2.

<sup>922</sup> LW 31:52-53 (*The Heidelberg Disputation*).

needs to be simultaneously qualified and redeemed by the Lord's strength to become the strength in weakness that can lead the apostle and his community onward to love and reconciliation (e.g. 6.3-13). Crucially, it is not only the believer who grows, but Christ who grows larger in their life (e.g. 1.3-7, 9b-10; 5.14-15; 12.9). For instance, in the affliction in Asia, it is as Paul realizes that the Lord brings power amidst deprivation that he falls into a death-life pattern reminiscent of the Christ event (1.9b-10). Even the climactic revelation of 12.9 envisions Christ growing larger on the horizon of Paul's life and, consequently, the apostle is enlivened and renewed by grace (v. 9b-10). This is emphatically not the *displacement* of the believer, but their *re-invigoration*. The paradox is a meeting place where one draws closer to Christ, but also deeper into their own identity in Christ. Christ appears as the archetype of a new way of living that is formed by the paradox, where the rhythms of his life are transposed into the lives of Paul and the Corinthian community.

My both/and response to the question of agency in 2 Corinthians is not dissimilar to theological analysis elsewhere. In particular, Ticciati outlines the various ways in which Augustine approaches this problem, beginning with the view that God's work is entirely efficacious.<sup>923</sup> This is expressed by Paul in contrastive statements where God's competence or ability is beyond that of humanity (e.g. 2 Cor. 3.5; 4.7b). Ticciati rightly refers to this as a 'but God' logic: humanity falls into sinfulness but God is sufficiently powerful to rescue us.<sup>924</sup> Ticciati's next agency rule focuses on the 'and' logic: human acts are the result of God's agency but are legitimately also their own, and thus involve their own sphere of influence (e.g. 12.10; 13.5).<sup>925</sup> The third rule explains how the first two work together—God influences the actions of all agents, so it does not make sense to contrast human and

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<sup>923</sup> Susannah Ticciati, *A New Apophaticism: Augustine and the Redemption of Signs* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 58-59.

<sup>924</sup> Ibid.

<sup>925</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

divine agents. Ticciati quotes Augustine in support: 'We, therefore, live more safely if we ascribe all to God, and do not attribute to him a part and to us a part....'<sup>926</sup> Notably, the prevailing readings of the paradox emphasize the first rule, whereas the transformative reading also makes use of the second and third rules—especially the second in light of the third. God's work in humanity is important because it enables a transformative understanding of the paradox. As Ticciati says, 'Divine and human agency stand in an asymmetric, but complementary, relation of absolute dependence, a dependence not of captivity and oppression but of generation and liberty.'<sup>927</sup> While Ticciati appears to go too far in saying God is dependent upon humanity, it is true that they must always be understood in relation to one another—God acts upon human beings and they always benefit from his gracious work.

In this sense, a transformative view of strength in weakness is ontological because real power arrives in human weakness, and revelatory given that the whole paradoxical experience is authored by God. In fact, I have shown that these views are complementary because the paradox can only settle upon humanity if it originates in the heavenly realm (see esp. 4.7-15). But crucially, both the ontological and revelatory views fail to capture the framework in which the paradox operates: it speaks to a weak apostle *and* his community, and upon receiving it, they experience a comprehensive transformation. Far from the diminishment of humanity, the paradox works to increase one's capacity to suffer precisely by redeeming weakness—without abolishing it—and thus rendering it fruitful. The key emphasis is that, whatever changes are being made in the human sphere, it is God in Christ taking care of Paul and the Corinthians. Christ appears to Paul, shouting above his struggle with pain that his weaknesses are necessary to perfect strength. The very pains

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<sup>926</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>927</sup> Ibid., 64.

haunting the community can also be paradoxically redeemed into experiences of joy, better knowledge of God, and above all, the ability to reconcile with Paul.

In other words, the transformative reading of the paradox understands Paul's elucidation of strength in weakness to be a re-interpretation of his gospel. It is a contextualization of the Christ event for the particular embodiment of the human condition in Corinth. This is notable for 2 Corinthians, an epistle which is thought to lack a clear Pauline gospel.<sup>928</sup> If one were to identify Paul's gospel using the prevailing paradigm, one would likely select the proclamation of comfort within the so-called reconciliatory letter (1.1-2.13; 7.5-16). However, for many interpreters, this occurs after the community has already become more congruous with the divine gift (i.e. by partially reconciling with Paul). My thesis highlights the Corinthians' pains throughout the material of 2 Corinthians and, in doing so, it reveals the incongruous and effective nature of God's grace for the Corinthians within the strength in weakness paradox. The absence of this viewpoint is nowhere more evident than in the erroneous suggestion that Paul's request for the thorn's removal (12.7) embodies Jesus's own prayer in Gethsemane (Mt. 20.23).<sup>929</sup> What these interpreters fail to see is the context in which Paul writes—his shared pain with the Corinthians (2.1-7)—and the textual clues in the episode itself (12.5b, 7a) which indicate that Paul has been overwhelmed by the thorn in the flesh. Both he and the community embody a redemptive context that requires divine aid. This misdiagnosis of the human condition in 2 Corinthians creates a stifled view of the impending transformation (12.9-10). It is only with the paradox that Paul has any chance of handling his weakness and seeing

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<sup>928</sup> E.g. Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 21; Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 361. It is instructive that Harris, *Corinthians*, 118 tries to summarize the 'gospel' in 2 Corinthians and he has far less to say about it than other topics in his theological prolegomena: 'The Church', 'Apostleship', etc. This is not to mention that half of his description of 'the gospel' in 2 Corinthians is actually about gospel ministers rather than their message.

<sup>929</sup> E.g. Plummer, *Corinthians*, 353; Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 448; Martin, *Corinthians*, 417.

God's power working within it. The paradox enables Paul to be more like Jesus in Gethsemane by reforming his identity, knowledge, emotions and behaviour. This is important to keep in mind as I proceed to the next section, where Christ-like actions, built from the paradox, are to take centre stage.

#### *vi. Summary*

In the previous section, I began by reviewing the revelatory view of the paradox, which focuses on attaining a heavenly perspective that can perceive the interior work of God in outwardly weak individuals. On the other hand, the ontological reading stresses the necessary, prior achievement of humility in order to acquire God's power. Some interpreters, such as Heckel and Aejmelaeus, combine these perspectives by oscillating between them. But the problems remain the same: both viewpoints are too narrow, and neither properly considers how the paradox might benefit Paul *and* the Corinthians, let alone provides a satisfactory answer to the polarity of strength or weakness. In fact, the ontological view works against any such solution by stressing to a pained apostle and community that the answer to their pains is further abasement. While this initially appears to be a flaw unique to the ontological view, the revelatory view also envisions the displacement of human power by insisting on a heavenly perspective as opposed to an earthly one. In this sense, both views place God's power in competition with humanity's.

This led to the section above, where I offered my reading of 2 Cor. 12.9-10—what I call the transformative view of the paradox. I argued that this transformation is an act of God, represented by his intrusive grace, which invades the human sphere to change Paul's theology, followed by his emotions and behaviour. Although Paul initially refers to God's strength (v. 9a), the weakness in question is also divine in origin given that the thorn in the flesh is the result of a divine passive (v. 7). So the Lord's word is inherently transcendent.

It establishes a special relationship between strength and weakness through the use of *τελέω*—a term which suggests a co-dependent relationship between the two entities. This is what I call co-inherence: where two opposites are simultaneously occurring and mutually qualify one another. This concept of paradox is helpful for Paul's and the Corinthians' polarity because it gives them access to strength *while* affirming the value of their weaknesses, without going so far as to say that weakness is, in isolation, good.

Paul signals that he has apprehended this word from the Lord through a series of deductions signalled by the term *οὖν*, which indicates that the paradox is intelligible as paradox, and leads to the transformation of his emotions (*ἡδέως*) and behaviour (*καυχάομαι*) (v. 9b). In particular, Paul is able to withstand the accusations of his opponents through co-inherent rebound: their claims are ineffectual because, as they draw attention to Paul's weaknesses, the paradox continually delivers strength (v. 9c). This culminates in the stabilization of the paradox, where Paul becomes content with his weaknesses, rather than intimidated by them (v. 10). Through the creative work of God's grace, what was once God's power and weakness has now become Paul's: 'when I am weak, then I am strong' (v. 10b). Contrary to prevailing views, this represents the paradoxical increase of human potential, which is not in competition with the increase of Christ's presence in the lives of Paul and the Corinthians. So the transformative view of strength in weakness captures the broader framework in which the paradox operates: it is concerned with having the proper perspective of one's weaknesses (revelatory), and it creates humility (ontological), but it also affects one's emotions, theology, and behaviour too. It is, above all, God's gracious solution to a situation in which both Paul and the Corinthians must learn how to relate to one another amidst deep personal weakness.

## V. The Fruits of Strength in Weakness: Folly and Love (v. 11-21)

This section begins with Paul's declaration: 'I have been a fool [ἄφρων]! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior [ὕστερέω] to these super-apostles [ὑπερλίαν ἀποστόλων]' (v. 11). The initial confession of folly ends the *inclusio* that demarcates the Fool's Speech,<sup>930</sup> which may explain why many interpreters tend to ignore v. 11-21. There are several projects on strength in weakness that do not give any significant treatment to these verses; indeed, this is one of the most overlooked passages in 2 Corinthians.<sup>931</sup> This is concerning, not least because I have observed that Paul often saves his direct instructions for the Corinthians until the close of a paradoxical argument (e.g. 1.11; 4.15; 6.11-13). In other words, one has not fully traced the paradox's transformative function, which begins in v. 9-10, until its immediate aftermath in v. 11-21 has been considered.

Of course, the later clauses of 12.11, especially the mention of the super-apostles, appear to indicate the end of Paul's tendency to address the Corinthians following a description of the paradox. Hafemann representatively concludes that Paul 'closes his apology' here, in which he saw 'the need to match his opponents in their boast'.<sup>932</sup> Yet Barnett is right to note that Paul's emphatic second-person pronouns point to a continued focus on the Corinthians.<sup>933</sup> Paul addresses the community several verses later, stating his desire for reconciliation (v. 15) and noting his interest in building up the community (v. 18-21)—all of which are discussed shortly.<sup>934</sup> These elements are a reminder that Paul is not merely interested in his opponents, but in the community generally and in the

<sup>930</sup> See p. 217-20 above.

<sup>931</sup> E.g. Hotze, *Paradoxien*, 159-251; Heckel, *Kraft*, 52-143; Pickett, *Cross*, 160-211; Lim, *Sufferings*, 158-199. To be fair, Heckel surveys these verses, but this is within his overview of 2 Cor. 10-13 (p. 40-44).

<sup>932</sup> Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 466.

<sup>933</sup> Barnett, *Corinthians*, 578. Also see Plummer, *Corinthians*, 357.

<sup>934</sup> See p. 275ff below.

opponents' influence upon them. It seems that the Corinthians' wellbeing has not slipped from Paul's mind, neither here nor in the Fool's Speech more broadly.<sup>935</sup> What remains to be seen is why Paul begins to speak about himself once more and how, if at all, the theology of strength in weakness contributes to Paul's folly.

*i. Paul's Increasing Foolishness (v. 11-13)*

Any consideration of the paragraph beginning in v. 11 is incomplete without giving attention to the dominant literary device at play: irony. Paul makes an apparent concession that he is not 'inferior [ὕστερέω]' to the super-apostles, though he is 'nothing [οὐδέν]' (v. 11). The latter statement is almost universally understood as an ironic remark due to Paul's argument that, even in his weakness, he possesses strength (v. 9-10).<sup>936</sup> To be fair, when arguing from a human standpoint, Paul does portray himself as helpless and insufficient (e.g. 3.5; 11.29). But it still holds that Paul does not provide the full truth here. He emphasizes his nothingness, probably to underline the incongruity of God's work in his life (i.e. 12.9).

This leads to Paul's claim of ministerial power in signs, miracles, and wonders (v. 12). Most interpreters oddly relinquish their awareness of Paul's rhetorical flourishes here and take him at his word: Paul is making the same claim to power as the opponents.<sup>937</sup> To be fair, these interpreters agree that Paul finds his power in a different *manner*, although the *result* is the same. Even those who stress the distance between Paul's argument and the opponents' read him as making a claim in this paradigm—Paul shows that he is not

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<sup>935</sup> See e.g. Harris, *Corinthians*, 883; Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 461; Guthrie, *Corinthians*, 610.

<sup>936</sup> See e.g. Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:836-37 and Betz, *Sokratische*, 122-28; cf. Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 456.

<sup>937</sup> E.g. Bultmann, *Corinthians*, 231; Stegman, *Corinthians*, 275; Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:840-41.



'lacking' anything.<sup>938</sup> But Paul's position hardly seems foolish if he cites mighty works in his defense. This reading is especially problematic given that most interpreters take the conclusion of the paragraph, v. 13, to be ironic too.<sup>939</sup> At this point, the prevailing interpretation of the paragraph begins to splinter: it seems better to suggest that irony saturates the whole paragraph, including Paul's remark about signs and wonders. This is especially so given my analysis of the ascent to paradise and the thorn in the flesh, which show that visionary experiences led the apostle to pride (v. 7).

The key to understanding what Paul means by signs, wonders, and mighty works rests in Plank's conclusion that paradox 'riddles the categories through which we would comprehend...the world.'<sup>940</sup> This recalls my earlier observation that the strength in weakness paradox has totally changed Paul's categories of evaluation.<sup>941</sup> He must not be referring to miraculous works when he refers to such things; rather, the signs, wonders, and mighty works of his ministry are his moments of strength in weakness. The crucial clue that Paul is being ironic is his use of ἐν πάσῃ ὑπομονῇ (v. 12), which is totally unnecessary if Paul is truly referring to mighty deeds. Instead, he signals that the legitimacy of his ministry rests not in his power, but in God's; not in accumulating wondrous deeds, but in waiting on the Lord to bring paradoxical deliverance. In this sense, the irony of v. 12 represents a total change in the nature of the debate between Paul and his rebellious community—he is not matching their boast, he is rendering it ineffectual (e.g. 10.12; 11.4).

In particular, this is what the paradox has achieved for Paul: formerly cowering in weakness (12.7); the apostle now embraces impotence and turns the Corinthians' pointed claims on their head. This is not the argument of a selfish pastor nor merely the defence of

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<sup>938</sup> Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 456. Also see Harris, *Corinthians*, 875-77 and Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 467-68.

<sup>939</sup> See e.g. Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:842; Collins, *Corinthians*, 244; Plummer, *Corinthians*, 360.

<sup>940</sup> Plank, 'Paradoxical', 132.

<sup>941</sup> See p. 258-60 above.

a brilliant rhetorician; these are words born out of grace for a man in dire weakness (12.9). This places Paul's efforts to defend himself upon a completely different terrain, in which the apostle is not trying to scale the mountain of self-glorification or the exposition of the apostleship; rather, he aims to show that Christ's work inaugurates a new approach to weakness, where it is co-inherently joined to strength. The Corinthians accused Paul of being ironic: he claims to be a powerful leader, but he is weak (10.10). Paul, however, shows that the Corinthians are ironic: they think power alone is the goal of Christian life, but it is actually power in the midst of weakness—the very thing they want to avoid. So Paul's emphasis on the paradox of strength in weakness heightens his foolishness, clarifying that he is not claiming power, but power in weakness. While this really is foolish, in Paul's view, it is equally vindicating and transformative. Christ is enabling a dejected Paul to attain the ideal of irony: 'that I may always have the laugh on my side.'<sup>942</sup>

But lest one think that this whole paragraph concerns Paul, his argument is foreshadowing what is to become increasingly evident: the strength in weakness paradox involves a change in values that not only transforms Paul, but more importantly, could liberate the Corinthians from their enslavement to those who 'strike you in the face' (11.20). The Corinthians can be participants in Christ's *Umwertung*, in which they experience the transposition of values and behaviours that result from the Lord's grace. This change is initially evident in Paul's reversal of irony, although it becomes far more perspicuous in a concrete act that is of great utility in Paul's ongoing effort to bring about reconciliation.

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<sup>942</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *EO* I:41-2.

*ii. A Love-Enabling Paradox (v. 14-18)*

After preparing the Corinthians for what is to come, Paul aims the transformative capacity of the paradox in the direction of Corinth: 'Here for the third time [τρίτον], I am ready to come to you....I seek not what is yours, but you' (v. 14-15). The suggestion that Paul subtly refers to the collection in the last clause is not unfounded, but his interest lies in far more than the collection.<sup>943</sup> Throughout the letter, especially 12.1-10, the apostle's interest has been the Corinthians' spiritual wellbeing. Although the collection is a component of Corinth's commitment to Christ (e.g. 8.7-8), it has not been explicitly mentioned for several chapters. Paul's focus is the middle verses of the paragraph—v. 14b-15. He refers to the Corinthians as his 'children' (v. 14b) before making a poignant appeal: 'I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love [ἀγαπάω] you more, am I to be loved [ἀγαπάω] less?' (v. 15).

Most, if not all, interpreters do not connect Paul's statement about love with the strength in weakness paradox.<sup>944</sup> The apostle's question to the Corinthians is seen simply as an implication that flows from his defense—he has proven his legitimacy, so the Corinthians should love him.<sup>945</sup> But Paul has just reached the climax of strength in weakness in v. 9-10, and in v. 11-13 he revels in the paradox's ironic impact on his life and ministry. If Paul loves the Corinthians (v. 15) as their spiritual father (v. 14b)—no doubt a part of his ministry—the strength in weakness paradox must have some role to play in this feat. This is especially the case when one considers the community's attitude toward Paul: they either dormantly ignore him (e.g. 6.11-13) or actively try to smear his reputation (e.g. 10.10). How would Paul be able to endure such difficulties and still love this community?

<sup>943</sup> So Stegman, *Corinthians*, 278; Martin, *Corinthians*, 440; Seifrid, *Corinthians*, 459.

<sup>944</sup> The only substantial exception is Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 155-267. However, Gorman emphasizes the virtues exhibited at Christ's cross rather than developing a robust paradox of strength in weakness. For a critique of Gorman's concept of cruciformity, see sec. VIII.ii of Ch. 3.

<sup>945</sup> See e.g. Martin, *Corinthians*, 443; Garland, *Corinthians*, 533; Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 485-86.

One might say that Paul's ability to love rests in a sense of duty to his spiritual children (v. 14b). But this answer simply begs the question. One must consider what gives Paul this sense of duty in the first place.

A helpful way of reading these verses is to consider the complementary rationales that Paul has been accumulating to this point. He is reasoning here within the frame of his ministry, so one is justified in compiling such arguments.<sup>946</sup> The first line of argument is the intrusive grace of Christ, which moves outwardly, bringing the paradox into Paul's life amidst his helplessness (12.8-9). It is defined by Christ, who speaks it into existence, and is elsewhere the first mover across the gap between divine competence and human impotence.<sup>947</sup> As argued above, it is out of this grace that the co-inherence of strength and weakness is born. This brings a stabilization of the apostle's polarity, which impacts his knowledge, emotions, and behaviour (v. 10). In this sense, Christ makes Paul into a new person. But Paul has yet to unveil the most significant dimension of this transformation. Plank rightly says that a paradox implies the 'mutual and perpetual qualification of its terms'.<sup>948</sup> This means that the conceit of Paul's visions and the desperation of his thorn are brought together and made to complete one another. His pride and despair together create intention and humility, but now without the polar experiences of selfishness (cf. v. 7a) and self-loathing (cf. v. 8).<sup>949</sup>

Within this context, it follows that Paul's profession of love for the Corinthians flows directly from the paradox. Kierkegaard likewise refers to love as the 'coup de grâce' in which one undertakes a difficult task: 'simultaneously to be rigorous as the truth requires and yet be mild in such a way as love desires in order to win the one against whom rigour

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<sup>946</sup> See p. 274-75 above.

<sup>947</sup> See sec. III.i of Ch. 3.

<sup>948</sup> Plank, 'Paradoxical', 141.

<sup>949</sup> For a fuller explanation of this process elsewhere (i.e. 2 Cor. 6.10-13), see sec. V of Ch. 4.

is employed! Truly is it a miracle, if it succeeds, because it is, like everything Christian, directly opposite to the proverb: One cannot do two things at the same time.<sup>950</sup> In other words, Paul's act of love requires the opposite experiences of strength and weakness in paradoxical harmony. Love requires initiative, but it is not self-seeking. It accepts others no matter their position, appearance, or status. This is what Martin Luther King Jr. meant when he said 'love is the most durable power in the world.'<sup>951</sup> It conforms to the other, it puts up with their weaknesses, and in this sense, it embodies weakness itself (1 Cor. 13.4-5). But paradoxically, it is a most difficult action, requiring great commitment and endurance (1 Cor 13.6-7). In this sense, Paul's ἀγάπη-love is a *synergistic fruit* of the paradox. The apostle speaks vulnerably to Corinth because Christ has taken care of his vulnerabilities. The Lord redeems Paul's weaknesses, the very wedge driven between him and the Corinthians, so that they can be a tool of reconciliation. Due to a paradoxical injection of strength, Paul's weakness becomes like Bunyan's Valley of Humiliation: the valley is a fruitful, green place rather than a desolate wasteland.<sup>952</sup>

The crucial turn in Paul's argument occurs when he becomes explicitly reciprocal concerning his act of love. He states, 'If I love you more, *am I to be loved less?*' (v. 15) (*italics mine*). The Corinthians are expected to drop their resistance to God's grace, and thus to the apostle Paul, and receive the transformation outlined in v. 9-10. The missing ingredient to God's enactment of this transformation is outlined in the following section.<sup>953</sup> But for the moment, the reciprocity in Paul's argument reveals one of the key aims of his letter to Corinth. He is not, as Aejmelaeus suggests, counteracting the '*Übermensch*' of

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<sup>950</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love: Some Christian Reflections in the Form of Discourses*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (London: Collins, 1962), 312; also 313.

<sup>951</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., *Strength to Love* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977), 56.

<sup>952</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. W.R. Owens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 301.

<sup>953</sup> See p. 285ff below.

Corinth.<sup>954</sup> His intent is not to destroy the quest for strength, but to radically re-orient it. Paul wants the Corinthians to be simultaneously strong and weak, rather than oscillating between the two, and to see such simultaneity not as a useless coincidence, but as a concrete reality in the Christian life which improves their ability to love. Their ongoing pride and despair, like Paul's, are to be united, clothing one another, and so producing the paradox's synergistic fruit. They will not aim for the *Übermensch*; instead, they are to become the *Paradoxmensch*. Pauline Christianity does not 'make suffering contagious',<sup>955</sup> as Nietzsche claimed; rather, it takes in weaklings and transforms their insecurities and vulnerabilities into fruitful realities by making them paradoxically congruent with strength. This is the beauty of Paul's call for reconciliation: while his weaknesses are redeemed into a tool for reconciliation, Christ can take the Corinthians' negative emotions and make them serve those same ends. In this sense, the Corinthians become bigger people while Christ also grows more influential in their lives. They attain the Christ-like ideal of outward-focused vulnerability, the capacity to say 'yes' to a miniature re-enactment of Jesus's Gethsemane sacrifice—an affirmative decision to undergo more weakness, in action and through association with Paul, if it means that they will love the apostle. Such a decision would represent an increase in their capacity for fellowship as they begin to embody their new identity as paradoxically strong in weakness through Christ.

### *iii. Paul's Underestimated Declaration of Intent (v. 19)*

Following the turn to Corinth in the argument above, the apostle offers his most explicit clarification of his concern for the Corinthians' wellbeing. He begins a new paragraph by asking, 'Have you been supposing all along [πάσαι] that we have been defending ourselves [ἀπολογέομαι] to you?' (v. 19). Most interpreters agree that Paul's use

<sup>954</sup> Aejmelaeus, *Schwachheit*, 300; 317, 402.

<sup>955</sup> Walter Kaufman, *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Viking, 1968), 565-656 [*Antichrist* #7].

of *πάσαι* refers to all of chs. 10-13 and, if a unity, to the whole of 2 Corinthians.<sup>956</sup> This makes Paul's answer to his own question far more interesting, where he asserts that his argument has been 'all for your upbuilding [*οικοδομή*]' (v. 19b). While this clarification of Paul's purpose is well-recognized, many interpreters double down on the apologetic nature of the material (whether chs. 10-13 or beyond) by claiming that it nonetheless serves the Corinthians' spiritual lives.<sup>957</sup> Some even entertain the possibility of obfuscation or irony.<sup>958</sup> Betz and Windisch go so far as to suggest that Paul is merely denying the *rhetorical form* of apology and is otherwise engaging in a self-defense.<sup>959</sup> Of course, one cannot deny that Paul engages in apologetic activity in 2 Corinthians (e.g. 3.1-18; 11.1-6). But one has to be careful about how this is understood. Barrett clarifies that Paul has not engaged in a thoroughgoing apology because 'a defense is a self-regarding composition', whereas an apostolic writing is 'before God', who is the only judge of Paul's ministry.<sup>960</sup> As a result, some interpreters stress that Paul's clarification does not so much concern the *ἀπολογούμεθα* as the *ὑμῖν*—he is defending himself, but not to the Corinthians.<sup>961</sup> Nonetheless, the direction of the field is captured by most interpreters' use of terms like 'apology', 'defence' and 'apologetic' to describe Paul's argument despite his apparent disinterest in such activity.<sup>962</sup>

While the collective confusion surrounding Paul's meaning is somewhat understandable, it appears rather unnecessary when one considers the evidence accumulated over the course of my analysis of 2 Corinthians. Any possibility of irony is

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<sup>956</sup> E.g. Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:858; Barrett, *Corinthians*, 327; Harris, *Corinthians*, 894.

<sup>957</sup> See e.g. Thrall, *Corinthians*, II: 860-61; Barnett, *Corinthians*, 592-93; Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 487.

<sup>958</sup> E.g. Garland, *Corinthians*, 534-35 and Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:860.

<sup>959</sup> Betz, *Sokratische*, 39 and Windisch, *Korintherbrief*, 406.

<sup>960</sup> Barrett, *Corinthians*, 328.

<sup>961</sup> E.g. Witherington, *Corinthians*, 468; Bultmann, *Corinthians*, 236-237 and Windisch, *Korintherbrief*, 406-407.

<sup>962</sup> E.g. Savage, *Weakness*, 11, 187-190; Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 202; Hafemann, *Corinthians*, 487; Barnett, *Corinthians*, 592.

ruled out by the situation: due to the pains caused by Paul's previous visit and letter, the Corinthians require upbuilding that goes beyond what one can deliver with a thoroughgoing apology.<sup>963</sup> In fact, the sheer volume of Paul's references to working for the Corinthians' sake (e.g. 1.6-7, 2.10, 4.15, 12.15) suggest that his interest in building up the community should be taken very seriously. While Paul's defense certainly serves the Corinthians' spiritual life, not least due to the apostle's vocation as Christ's ambassador (e.g. 5.18-20), this explanation hardly captures the thrust of the argument in 2 Corinthians. Paul has been tracing a paradoxical transformation that affects one's knowledge (e.g. 6.8b-10; 12.9b), emotions (e.g. 1.11; 7.4), and behaviour (e.g. 4.12; 6.11-13), culminating in a change in one's identity (e.g. 12.10). In this sense, Paul re-contextualizes his gospel to show the Corinthians how Christ helps them in their weakness (e.g. 1.5b; 12.9a). So the insights of the apologetic paradigm do not need to be entirely jettisoned; rather, it is precisely in Paul's apologetic arguments that he is at once jockeying with the opponents regarding his weakness *and* delivering discourses inherently relevant to the Corinthians. This is especially signalled by his repeated turns to the community immediately following such discourses (e.g. 1.11; 4.14-15; 6.11-13). He routinely comforts and encourages the community (e.g. 1.3-7; 7.10-13; 10.9), and this is not to mention the pastoral sensitivity that he shows in his changes of tone. Far from the result of Paul's own emotional struggles, the apostle varies his tone to suit the different experiences of his bipolar community (e.g. 10.2, 8). This collection of evidence can only lead to the conclusion that Paul, while maintaining some interest in defending himself, really is distinguishing his work from that of an apology. It suggests that terms such as 'apology' and 'defense' are ultimately unhelpful for describing 2 Corinthians because they misunderstand the essence of its

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<sup>963</sup> See sec. II-III, IV.ii of Ch. 2.



argument, which is not *primarily* a defense, nor a defense with *merely* an overarching goal of upbuilding.

The pastoral implications of Paul's argument are further underscored by his use of οἰκοδομή (v. 19; 10.8). The apostle claims that he writes for the community's 'upbuilding', which is a particularly apt metaphor given that Paul has just revealed the stabilizing nature of the paradox—how it calms a polarity of strength and weakness to create contentment where dread once flourished (v. 10). In this sense, the paradox provides a foundation upon which Paul can build up the community towards fruitfulness in the Christian life. The apostle accordingly concludes the paragraph by listing his concerns about the state of the Corinthians before his impending third visit (v. 20-21). This helps to reveal just how deeply the apologetic paradigm misunderstands the letter: what should be seen as an unsurprising clarification that Paul is not writing an apology has been reduced to a verse saturated in controversy and confusion. In some cases, interpreters even deny the full force of a statement that penetrates to the depths of Paul's purpose—the apostle is not primarily, nor generally, defending himself. Paul's *primary and overarching* goal is to minister to the Corinthians through comforting, teaching, and communicating his gospel to them (in distinction from simply defending or exegeting his ministry), and this concern *permeates* the material. 2 Corinthians is not merely a description of Pauline ministry, it is more importantly a working example of this ministry to a specific community. Paul is concerned with the transformation of the pained Corinthians *via* the strength in weakness paradox.

#### *iv. Summary*

This section began by considering the conclusion of the Fool's Speech (12.11) and how Paul's strength in weakness argument might contribute to his foolishness. I observed that most interpreters understand Paul to be speaking ironically when he refers to himself

as 'nothing' (v. 11). However, in assessing his claim to performing 'signs, wonders, and mighty works' (v. 12), they take him to be deadly serious given that he needs to match his opponents' boast. I argue that this misunderstands the paradox: the legitimacy of Paul's ministry is that he does not perform mighty works, but is the recipient of God's power in the midst of weakness (v. 9-10). In other words, the whole paragraph (v. 11-13) needs to be understood as an ironic proclamation of the reversal in values marked by the strength in weakness paradox. This leads into Paul's next argument, which directly concerns the Corinthian community. The apostle states that he loves the Corinthians, and implies that they should reciprocate this love (v. 15). Although interpreters rarely, if at all, understand this request to be related to the paradox, an act of love is clearly an expression of the strength in weakness paradox. Love has elements of both strength and weakness (cf. 1 Cor 13.4-7), and an experience of the mutual qualification of the paradox would enable the Corinthians to love their weak apostle. Their pride would be redeemed into initiative through their weakness, and their despair would be improved into humility, all of which are necessary for love. Finally, Paul concludes by clarifying that he has not been defending himself, but building up the Corinthians (v. 19). Interpreters seriously question this remark, suggesting that Paul is being disingenuous or that he refers to only a particular part of his argument. But all of my previous analysis shows that this verse should be taken very seriously: Paul's *primary* and *overarching* goal is the transformation of the pained Corinthians through the strength in weakness paradox.

## VI. The Paradox's Missing Ingredient (13.1-5)

Although the climax of 2 Corinthians has passed, Paul's conclusion is important because it addresses several loose ends in his argument. He begins, 'This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three

witnesses' (13.1). After warning the Corinthians that he will punish their sinfulness (v. 2), he suggests this would actually be proof of 'Christ speaking' in him (v. 3a). As discussed previously, he then acknowledges that his experience of strength in weakness comes through union with Christ.<sup>964</sup> As Christ was 'crucified in weakness [ἀσθένεια], but lives by the power of God [ἐκ δυνάμεως θεοῦ]', Paul also is 'weak in him [ἀσθενούμεν ἐν αὐτῷ]' but in dealing with the Corinthians he will 'live with him by the power of God [ἐκ δυνάμεως θεοῦ]' (v. 4). In the following paragraph, Paul delivers his challenge to the Corinthians: 'Examine yourselves [ἐαυτοὺς πειράζετε] to see whether you are still in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves: that Jesus Christ is in you [ἐν ὑμῖν]—unless you fail to meet the test [δοκιμάζω]!' (v. 5). This is a remarkable conclusion for what is often viewed as an apologetic letter, not least amidst the chapters most often associated with the opponents. Paul makes threats (v. 1-2), but he is focused on the improvement of the Corinthians' faith.

Some scholars describe the Corinthians' faith in very human terms, choosing to emphasize the Corinthians' volition.<sup>965</sup> Stegman suggests that 13.1-5 is the climax of 2 Corinthians, where Paul makes Jesus the archetype of Christian conduct and calls the community to adopt the 'ethos' or 'character' of Christ.<sup>966</sup> According to Stegman, Paul repeatedly refers to attributes of Jesus, such as faithfulness (e.g. 4.13) or love (e.g. 5.14), then uses δοκιμ- language to demand that the Corinthians mimic Christ's behaviour.<sup>967</sup> If the Corinthians were to prove their faith, Stegman believes that they would satisfy the ultimate test of Christ's character. However, one must keep in mind the apostle's assumption that, if the Corinthians have faith, they have Jesus living *within* them (v. 5b).

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<sup>964</sup> See sec. III.i of Ch. 3.

<sup>965</sup> See e.g. Martin, *Corinthians*, 477; Plummer, *Corinthians*, 376-77; Harris, *Corinthians*, 919-920.

<sup>966</sup> Stegman, *Character*, 304-09.

<sup>967</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

Paul's use of οὐκ shows that he expects the Corinthians to answer affirmatively—yes, Jesus lives in us!<sup>968</sup> Their argument against Paul is likewise based on possessing spiritual power (e.g. 2.17; 3.1-5; 10.10). In this sense, the Corinthians' faith needs to be tested, although it does not lie entirely within their control. More than conformity to an ideal, their faith is meant to be defined by Christ's work in the heart (e.g. 4.6; 5.12) and his identity as the object of faith. The pressing question of this section thus becomes: what does Paul find significant about Jesus that is lacking in Corinth?

*i. The Paradigm of Paradigms: Believing in a Crucified and Resurrected Christ*

The main issue besetting Stegman—and most interpreters—in 13.4-5 is the manner in which they overlook the wider spectrum upon which Jesus' character is found.<sup>969</sup> Christ has many characteristics, but Paul repeatedly emphasizes that he embodies strength in weakness (e.g. 1.5; 4.7-15; 5.21; 8.9). Prior to Paul's challenge in 13.5, the apostle likewise says that he is heartened by Christ who was 'crucified in weakness' but 'lives by the power of God' (v. 4). This surprising combination contains the apostle's favoured opposites—strength and weakness—although they occur in sequence rather than simultaneously. Nonetheless, the occurrence of two opposing realities within the life of Christ is a proto-paradox, particularly one that is overlooked by interpreters.<sup>970</sup> As a result, the link in Paul's argument between faith and the strength in weakness paradox is often missed. If the Corinthians have faith, they will embody not merely Jesus's faithfulness, but his paradox of death and resurrection. It would have been easy for the Corinthians to accept faith in a Jesus of resurrection power, but the Corinthians are meant to showcase the life *and* death of Jesus through their reconciliation with an apostle as weak as Paul (e.g. 6.10-13; 12.15;

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<sup>968</sup> So Furnish, *Corinthians*, 572 and Stegman, *Character*, 360.

<sup>969</sup> Stegman, *Character*, 359, also see e.g. Bultmann, *Corinthians*, 244-246 and Thrall, *Corinthians*, II:887-892.

<sup>970</sup> To my knowledge, there are no attempts to develop the nature of faith in relation to strength in weakness in this passage.

cf. 4.10-11). Therefore, what is missing in the Corinthians' communal life is this Christological construct that brings transformation.

But some might object: why does Paul posit a *simultaneous* experience of strength in weakness in 12.9-10 given the *temporal sequence* of Jesus's death and resurrection in 13.4? As noted previously, Kraftchick suggests that Paul condenses the sequence of Christ's death and resurrection into the guiding *metaphor* of the letter's theology using a non-syllogistic process.<sup>971</sup> Although helpful, an even better explanation rests with how the simultaneity of strength and weakness is produced in the first place: it is not a reality inaugurated by Paul, but from Christ's own proclamation (12.9a). Jesus's self-interpretation forms the basis for understanding his death and resurrection through a co-inherent paradox. Of course, this still does not explain how the two events create a paradox, although one can already see that they are integrally related to one another. Even as a sequence, Christ's death enables his resurrection, and the resurrection is impossible without death. It may also be that other theological reasons push Paul to connect the paradox to the Christ event. He elsewhere underlines Jesus's divine and human qualities (e.g. 2 Cor. 4.4-6; Rom. 5.15-21; Gal. 2.19-21; 3.13-14; Phil 2.6-11). Consequently, one could conclude that it is only through Christ's transcendence that the paradox is preserved while it descends into the human realm as a result of the incarnation.<sup>972</sup>

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Paul may be linking the paradox with Christ due to the manner in which the Lord is received—through human faith (13.5; 5.6-10). Paul repeatedly shows that faith eschews human reputation and status (4.6-7; 5.12; 10.15), being a posture that recognizes one's dependence on God. This serves as a helpful counterbalance to the strong statements the apostle has made about the transformation of humanity. As

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<sup>971</sup> Kraftchick, 'Death', 156-64.

<sup>972</sup> See sec. VII.iii of Ch. 3.

argued previously, Paul envisions the Corinthians receiving the paradox by virtue of their participation with Christ and being transformed in such a way that the pragmatic difference between God and humanity is lessened.<sup>973</sup> In short, the paradox increases their capacity to be like Christ. Within 13.5, however, the apostle returns to the paradigm of paradigms: the broader incongruity within which the paradox and all of its fruits operate—a faith completed by Christ living within believers. If the community is to experience paradoxical transformation, they must have faith, and in so doing, renounce their right to boast and become what Calvin refers to as 'naked to God'.<sup>974</sup> The caveats are that this is not a self-emptying—their faith coincides with the empowering of the divine presence (v. 5b)—and the Corinthians' nakedness to God is far from an ontological pre-requisite to strength. Although the paradox is, like all things in the Christian life, dependent upon faith, it can still be granted to those who are mostly faithless by virtue of God's grace (e.g. 1.8-9). The reason that Paul calls the Corinthians to faith is that they have wandered *too far* from Jesus, and the evidence of this is the almost total lack of strength in weakness in Corinth.

With this perspective on 13.1-5, it is now possible to describe the apostle's final aim. Paul desires *the paradoxical realization* of the Corinthians' faith in Jesus, especially the *transformation of their polarity of strength or weakness* so that they can *reconcile* with him. This suggests that the reason the Corinthians have not embodied the paradox is because they are *actively resisting* the work of Christ in their life. Jesus lives in them, and he wants to bring about his work of strength in weakness. But they actively pursue and uphold a polarity of strength or weakness. So Paul demands that they test themselves, and thus recall the nature of God's work in them. They were not made for their struggle with a

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<sup>973</sup> See p. 266-72 above.

<sup>974</sup> John Calvin, *Comentarii in Pauli Epistolas ad Galatas, ad Ephesios, ad Philippenses, ad Colossenses*, vol. 16 of *Ioannis Calvini Opera Exegetica*, ed. Helmut Field (Geneva: Droz, 1992), 356. As quoted in Dorothea Bertschmann, 'Is There a Kenosis in This Text? Rereading Philippians 3:2–11 in the Light of the Christ Hymn', *JBL* 137, no. 1 (2018): 235–54 [248].

polarity, but for the presence of Jesus in the paradox, and all of the love, hope, and reconciliation that accompanies it. Luther likewise says, 'In all things I can find profit toward salvation, so that the cross and death itself are compelled to serve me and to work together with me for my salvation. This is a splendid privilege and hard to attain...[where] there is nothing so good and nothing so evil but that it shall work together for good to me, *if only I believe*' (italics mine).<sup>975</sup> It bears repeating that if the community finds faith in Jesus, the process of embodying strength in weakness is not immediate—this was certainly not the case for Paul (cf. 12.8). But by a work of grace, the Corinthians may eventually know the God who comforts the downcast and thus embrace the apostle that they perceive to be inferior.

## VII. Conclusion

The first section of this chapter offered a brief overview of several interpretive issues relating to 2 Corinthians 10-13. I began by considering Paul's tone, which is largely understood to be harsher than 2 Corinthians 1-9 given that the apostle focuses more acutely upon the Corinthian rebellion. While I do not deny this, I argue that Paul is far more consoling than has been observed, and he openly states that his tone varies based upon the aspect of the complex Corinthian experience that he wishes to address. Most of all, he observes a stark polarity in the Corinthians' experience: they are accepting a position of shame in order to ride the coattails of the opponents' claims to strength (11.20). This not only confirms that the Corinthians are pained throughout the material, it demonstrates that current compositional theories are too simple. By relating Paul's changing tone to the complex Corinthian situation, I have outlined a new integrity theory that takes the diversity of the material seriously without positing hypothetical documents or situations. Secondly, I

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<sup>975</sup> LW 31:355 (*The Freedom of a Christian*).

considered the identity of the opponents and concluded that, with definite knowledge being out of reach, one should simply embrace what is common to all theories: the opponents are somehow associated with the community and encourage them to pursue a proud, self-focused strength that is totally set apart from weakness.

Consequently, the following section offered an exploratory reading of 12.1-8 that alters the background for Paul's experience of strength in weakness (v. 9-10). Rather than viewing Paul's visions as a positive experience meant to beat the opponents at their own game, I drew attention to the reluctant mention of the visions in v. 2 (i.e. 'fourteen years ago'; 'a person in Christ') and their association with pride in v. 7a. The latter especially suggests that Paul forms a negative paradigm for the Corinthians: he is modelling a past event in his life in which he pursued a strength in total antithesis to weakness. In an attempt to rectify Paul's pride, God gives Paul the thorn in the flesh (v. 7b), but Paul continues to interpret strength and weakness as mere opposites, crying out to God for the weakness of the thorn to be taken away (v. 8). This narrative—what I call a grand polarity—is so similar to the manner in which the Corinthians' pains create a desire for strength that it appears to implicitly address their situation and thus draw their attention to how the Lord transformed Paul's past polarity.

The transformative centre of the whole narrative is found in v. 9-10, where I critique the prevailing revelatory and ontological views of the paradox for failing to consider how the paradox might benefit Paul and the Corinthians. Above all, the revelatory and ontological views appear too narrow, emphasizing the attainment of heavenly knowledge or humility respectively, and thus placing human power and divine power in a competitive relationship. I then offered my own reading of v. 9-10, where I emphasized that although Paul refers to God's strength in v. 9a, he is also referring to a divine weakness



there, given that the thorn in the flesh is the result of a divine passive in v. 7. So the Lord's word is inherently transcendent. It establishes a special relationship between strength and weakness through the use of τελέω—a term which suggests a co-dependent relationship between the two entities. This is what I call co-inherence: where two opposites are simultaneously occurring and mutually qualify one another. My concept of paradox is especially helpful for Paul's and the Corinthians' polarity because it gives them access to strength *while* affirming the value of their weaknesses—without going so far as to say that weakness is, in isolation, good. Paul signals that he has apprehended this word from the Lord through a series of deductions signalled by the term οὖν, which leads to the transformation of his emotions (ἡδέως) and behaviour (καυχάομαι) (v. 9b). Through the creative work of God's intrusive grace, what was once God's power and weakness has now become Paul's: 'when I am weak, then I am strong' (v. 10b). In this sense, a key distinctive to my transformative reading is the growth of human potential. Using Ticcianti's Augustinian rules, I demonstrate that human and divine agency are not mutually exclusive. So the transformative view of strength in weakness captures the broader framework in which the paradox operates: it is concerned with having the proper perspective on one's weaknesses (revelatory), and it creates humility (ontological), but it also affects one's emotions, theology, and behaviour too. It is, above all, God's gracious solution to a situation in which both Paul and the Corinthians must learn how to relate to one another amidst personal weakness.

The third section focused on the concluding discourses of the letter, especially 12.14-18, where I propose a connection between the strength in weakness paradox and Paul's desire for reconciliation with the Corinthians. Plank rightly says that a paradox

always implies the 'mutual and perpetual qualification of its terms'.<sup>976</sup> This makes it possible to view Paul's proclamation of love for the Corinthians (v. 15) as the result of a heart transformed by strength in weakness: the conceit of his visions and the desperation of his thorn are being brought together and made to qualify one another. His pride and despair together create powerful intention and humility, without selfishness or self-loathing. This perfectly fits the nature of love (ἀγαπάω), which requires both commitment (i.e. strength) and selflessness (i.e. weakness) to have any existential significance (cf. 1 Cor 13.4-7). When Paul asks the Corinthians to reciprocate this love, he is suggesting that they do so via the transformation he has worked out in v. 9-10—the strength in weakness paradox. This proposal offers a better solution than present analyses of 12.14-18, and most importantly, it places the strength in weakness paradox—as paradox—at the heart of the relational issues in 2 Corinthians. Following this, Paul openly clarifies that he is not interested in defending himself and, instead, has written to build up the community (v. 19). I observe that this verse is shrouded in controversy because, within the apologetic paradigm, it simply does not make sense other than as a caveat that the apostle's apology benefits the community. However, given my argument in this chapter and previously, I conclude that the verse needs to be taken more seriously: Paul's *primary* and *overarching* goal is to see the community transformed amidst their pains through the strength in weakness paradox. This concern saturates the material, which is confirmed by the conclusion's focus on the community (e.g. 13.1-5). Given that the paradox derives from the Christ event (v. 4), I note that when Paul challenges the Corinthians to have faith in Jesus, he is expecting a paradoxical realization of their faith that will be manifested in new knowledge, emotions, and behaviour, especially reconciliation with the apostle.

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<sup>976</sup> Plank, 'Paradoxical', 141.

This summary returns naturally to the historical anecdote that began this chapter, where Erasmus asserted that Luther's Paul-inspired paradoxes are useless. The argument of this chapter has confirmed the irony in Erasmus' objection as the paradox is *the* theological device that focuses and completes Paul's argument to the Corinthians. However, there is no need to engage in Luther's *ad hominem* polemic against Erasmus for his dismissal of paradox. Perhaps Luther's comments to Oecolampadius concerning the paradox of the Eucharist are more relevant: 'So his argument runs: "I, Oecolampadius, say that the Scriptures in this case are contradictory." Now, isn't this a fine, delicate basis of faith, when a man can say, "Although God's Word stands there and says 'This is my body,' nevertheless because I cannot comprehend it or believe it...it is therefore not true and must have another meaning, regardless of how clearly God's Word stands there."<sup>977</sup> Although one can debate the merits of Luther's reading of the Lord's Supper, he identifies the right line of argument when he suggests that an interpreter might erroneously resolve a paradox because it seems contradictory—rather than upholding its form and exploring why it is employed. This is the case with many interpreters of 2 Corinthians, and the consequence of this mistake is the misunderstanding of Paul's argument. Only a paradox can solve a polarity, and in understanding this, one begins to see the deeply transformative nature of an experience of strength in weakness. So it is not a coincidence that, in the case of 2 Corinthians—long considered an apologetic letter—Luther has a distinctive view: one of his most-utilized passages for soul care is 2 Corinthians 12.9.<sup>978</sup> He understood the deeply personal, transformative dimensions of strength in weakness, and one hopes that the same may become true for modern interpreters of 2 Corinthians. If this were the case, it would lead not only to a change in readings of the paradox, but of 2 Corinthians as a whole.

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<sup>977</sup> LW 37:50 ("This is My Body").

<sup>978</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, *Luthers Seelsorge: Theologie in Der Vielfalt Der Lebenssituationen an Seinen Briefen Dargestellt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 462. Also Luther, *Letters*, 37, 41, 87, 98, 307.



## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

#### I. Summary

This thesis began by observing that the modern study of 2 Corinthians exists in a research paradigm which insists that the material, especially its main theological motif—the strength in weakness paradox (e.g. 4.7; 12.7-10)—is focused on Paul's life and ministry. Whether in a personal *apologia* or an exposition of the apostleship, Paul writes to a community that questions his appearance (e.g. 10.10) and speech (e.g. 11.6)—ultimately, they claim that he is 'weak' (10.10; 13.9). However, there are passages in 2 Corinthians that do not easily fit this paradigm. Paul begins by emphasizing comfort for the suffering Corinthians (1.6-7) and he later clarifies that he is disinterested in writing an apology (12.19). Some interpreters have even begun to implicitly or explicitly question the paradigm, including Welborn, who notes the significance of Paul's previous visit and letter, which resulted in pain (λύπη) for both apostle and community (2.1-7; 7.5-16). While Paul's experience of strength in weakness appears deeply formative for his life, it may be applicable to the community if they suffer pain, yet interpreters typically fail to explore the theological significance of this paradox and its connection to the community. This raises the question: is Paul simply *defending his ministry* or is he also *actively ministering* to the Corinthians?

The question above is not meant to create a false dichotomy; in fact, many interpreters rightly conclude that Paul's defense serves the Corinthians' spiritual lives (e.g. 5.18-20). Nonetheless, most scholars continue to describe the material largely as a defense or an exposition of the apostleship and, above all, they fail to develop the overarching

framework that the material is said to serve. So my investigation seeks to discover the *essence* of 2 Corinthians, especially whether Paul moves beyond defending or explaining his ministry—whether he consoles, instructs, and explains how the Christ event redeems the community's brokenness. In particular, I aimed to consider whether Paul speaks more *directly* and *deeply* to the community than previously thought, especially through an analysis of the strength in weakness paradox's function in the apostle's argument.

I began my investigation with Paul's use of  $\lambda\upsilon\pi$ - words (2.1-7; 7.5-16) because it relates to events that immediately precede the material in 2 Corinthians. Nonetheless, there is a dearth of research on these terms, and most interpreters *assume* that the Corinthians'  $\lambda\acute{\upsilon}\pi\eta$  refers to only one emotion—the 'godly grief' that led to 'repentance' (v. 9). The apparent ceasing of the community's pain is significant because it enables the prevailing research paradigm, where Paul responds, not to a hurting community, but to proud rebels who believe they are 'strong' enough to reject Paul's leadership (13.9; 10.10). While Welborn's work is helpful, he leaves several questions unanswered, not least being whether the community's pains are truly ongoing. So I offer an analysis focused on  $\lambda\upsilon\pi$ - words in the LXX, Philo, Josephus, and Plutarch which relate to relational conflict. I find that, for instance, Sirach uses this word group to refer to sadness/despair, irritation, and humiliation. Philo uses  $\lambda\upsilon\pi$ - words to describe despair, but distinctively refers to bitterness as well. Josephus utilizes  $\lambda\upsilon\pi$ - words to express heartbreak—i.e. incidents of great relational distress—as well as remorse. Plutarch refers to sadness and bitterness. Consequently, the semantic potential of  $\lambda\upsilon\pi$ - words is wide, and in light of all surveyed sources, it includes sadness/despair, bitterness, mourning, heartbreak, humiliation, jealousy, and remorse.

Given a similar *context of situation*, I consider which meanings of  $\lambda\upsilon\pi$ - words are utilized by Paul in 2 Corinthians. I suggest that the Corinthians' 'godly grief' is, in light of

its association with repentance (7.9), a remorse which produces punishment of the offender, and is thus not necessarily identical to the pain cited in 2.1-7. In fact, the offender is in despair (2.7), and the community would have been heartbroken in light of the internal rifts relating to his punishment (cf. 2.6). Furthermore, Paul is heartbroken by his community's rebellion (2.1-3); meanwhile the Corinthians are embittered towards Paul for rebuking them so sternly (2.4). This leads to my hypothesis that the Corinthians' pain is multi-faceted, with several emotions being distinct from their ceasing godly grief, and thus likely to be ongoing as the apostle pens the material in 2 Corinthians. Crucially, these pains also appear to be inhibiting reconciliation (2.1-2).

The first implication flowing from my reading of the Corinthians' pains concerns a connection between these pains and Paul's weaknesses. Notably, Paul includes *λυπ-* words in a chain of co-ordinated opposites that culminate in the *δύναμις-ἀσθένεια* pairing (2.7, cf. 4.7, 6.10; 12.9). Within this chain, *θλίψις* serves as a synonym for both *λυπ-* and *ἀσθεν-* words. These word groups are not only semantically similar, however, Paul uses strength and weakness as broad categories which incorporate other word groups (e.g. 11.21-29). In light of their semantic similarity, this suggests that *λυπ-* words are a *kind* of weakness. This is confirmed by the nature of pain in antiquity—a most intractable emotion—which was seemingly unsolvable from a human perspective. So the divine intervention of the strength in weakness paradox is necessary not only for Paul, but for the Corinthians. Far from being merely Paul's defense, the strength in weakness discourses form a paradigm for the community where they learn how Christ addresses their pains. This is possible through Paul's and the Corinthians' identification with Christ (e.g. 13.5).

Having suggested that the community is not merely strong (e.g. 10.2, 10; 13.9), but experiences weakness as well, one has to consider how ancient social dynamics influenced

the Corinthians' experience. I observe that honour/shame dynamics encouraged the shamed and weak to vigorously re-claim their honour, thus suggesting that the Corinthians' pains are *animating* their quest for strength. The community is essentially bipolar, viewing strength as the opposite of weakness, and constantly oscillating between the two realities in an almost simultaneous fashion. They inhabit a polarity of strength *or* weakness, where the opponents appear not so much as the instigators of the community's rebellion, but as a vehicle for the community to claim strength amidst underlying feelings of pain.

Given that unity and partition theories are dependent on the prevailing reading of the situation, I consider how a strong or weak community might affect one's view of the material's literary integrity. I observe that both partition and unity theories are not sufficiently complex given that the former posits hypothetical documents with singular themes and the latter postulates a single letter united by only one or two themes. In each case, a conflict which appears to involve a complex community is reduced to material that is far more simple and predictable. I have therefore investigated whether Paul's changing tone might be an instance of *unity through diversity*: his varying approach is not the result of different situations, but the consequence of a multi-faceted community in which he comforts their weaknesses and confronts their strengths.

Of course, each of the hypotheses above—the Corinthians' ongoing pains, the connection between pain and weakness, the community's polarity, and the solution to the integrity problem—must be confirmed over the course of my analysis. But I conclude that there is sufficient material to articulate my main hypothesis: Paul addresses the community's pains through his strength in weakness discourses, which aim to enact a comprehensive transformation of the Corinthians' knowledge, emotions, and behaviour, culminating in reconciliation with the apostle himself.



I began the third chapter by investigating 2 Cor. 1.3-7, where I observe that, contrary to most readings, the focus is not Paul's relaying of comfort to Corinth; rather, it is *God's* gift of comfort to *both* Paul and Corinth. Paul says that the Corinthians are receiving comfort in their *sufferings* (v. 6), which can be associated with their pains (2.1-7). Since Pauline thanksgivings are typically programmatic, one should take all of the material to possess this comforting function. In the affliction in Asia (1.8-11), I observe that Paul is despairing of life (v. 8), and thus models the Corinthians' polarity. But the apostle is changed by a manifestation of God's comfort, particularly what I call a *proto-paradox*: a Christological sequence in which life arrives after Paul experiences the 'sentence of death' (v. 9-10). This rescue lessens the pragmatic difference between God and humanity (i.e. the sense in which humanity tangibly struggles in suffering) through a transformation that alters Paul's view of God (v. 10a) and enables him to express the paradoxical emotion of hope (v. 10b)—all of which are necessary for the Corinthians too. In fact, Paul notes that this discourse is meant to bring thanksgiving in Corinth (v. 11). While most interpreters suggest that this is the result of Paul's defense, I argue that this conclusion is best explained by viewing the proto-paradox as a transformative experience which would enable the community to pray amidst their pain. In other words, Christ takes care of the Corinthians' vulnerabilities so that they can care for the vulnerabilities of others. This transformative focus is confirmed in 3.1-18, where Paul describes his ministry as one focused upon believers being transformed (μεταμορφόω) into Christ's image.

In 4.7-15, I analyze the first formal paradox of 2 Corinthians: the treasure in jars of clay (v. 7a). I observe that the treasure exists *within* the jar, not outside of it, nor does either entity receive primary emphasis. It is difficult to find a word that is nuanced enough to describe this intricate relationship, so I invest the Trinitarian term *co-inherence* with

new meaning. I use it to refer to 1) the simultaneous occurrence of two opposite entities or experiences which 2) mutually qualify one another (i.e. each entity is incomplete without the other). Unfortunately, modern interpreters resolve this paradox in a variety of ways, not least by viewing it as a contrast between divine power and human weakness. A theological paradox needs to be totally God-given to maintain its logical integrity, and it can thus only descend to the human sphere through Jesus, who appears as an archetypal Saviour amidst the weaknesses of Paul and the Corinthians. Likewise, Paul proceeds into a life-death paradox (v. 10-12), in which he models the outward-focused vulnerability of Christ by choosing to die for the Corinthians (i.e. selflessly serving them despite his weakness) (v. 11). But this is not an apostolic self-emptying: by virtue of his death, Paul also receives resurrection power alongside the Corinthians (v. 14), thus suggesting that it is a paradoxical injection of strength that enables both Paul and the community to serve one another. All of this is driven by God's intrusive grace (v. 15), which is incongruous (i.e. given to the weak) and effective (i.e. initiates a paradoxical transformation).

In the fourth chapter, I begin by recounting the material in 2 Cor. 1-5 with respect to the integrity problem. It is observed that Paul's tone changes too frequently and too deeply to support the material's typically generic partitions. I suggest that through various 'identification' verses (e.g. 3.1, 7.8-9), Paul associates these tone changes with the Corinthians' own oscillations between strength (e.g. 5.16-6.1) and weakness (e.g. 1.3-7; 2.1-7). Notably, these observations also support my suggestion that the community embodies a polarity. However, my primary focus in this chapter is 2 Cor. 6.3-13, one of the material's most overlooked passages. I argue that Paul begins by asking the Corinthians to reconcile with God (6.1), but crucially, he does so *via* a paradox (5.21). This suggests that his demand for reconciliation with Corinth (6.10-13) will also be *via* a paradox. While the

suffering catalogue (6.3-10) is typically viewed as apologetic, I argue that Paul also has the community in mind. Notably, he structures his experiences to move from virtues and vices to co-ordinated sets of the two that are paradoxically co-existent, although not fully co-inherent. The paradoxes are varied, representing paradoxical views of knowledge (v. 8b-9a), the emotions (v. 10a), and behaviour (v. 10b). In this sense, the paradox fundamentally alters Paul's view of reality.

The key question, however, relates to the connection between the catalogue (v. 3-10) and the call to reconciliation (v. 11-13). As predicted, there are paradoxes immediately preceding this call; however, they are generally ignored by interpreters. This is unfortunate because Paul depicts the Corinthians with closed hearts (v. 12-13)—a reference to the effects of λύπη. In other words, the Corinthians' pains are preventing reconciliation, even threatening the centre of their identity. The paradox consequently takes a crucial role in Paul's argument, especially the mutually qualifying relationship between strength and weakness. By declaring himself a subject of the paradox (v. 8b-10), and willing to reconcile (v. 11), Paul enacts a paradoxical logic of reconciliation: his strengths and weaknesses qualify one another, thus enabling him to have initiative without pride and humility without self-loathing. When he asks the Corinthians for reciprocity (v. 12-13), he implies that the Corinthians can experience the same transformation. Therefore, what prevents the Corinthians from reconciling—their pains—is redeemed to produce reconciliation. Like Irenaeus, Paul suggests that suffering can be a fruitful reality. But he uniquely shows that it is not inherently redemptive. Paul injects meaning into the Corinthians' pains only through a paradoxical congruence with divine strength.

Finally, I consider 7.5-16, where I note the return of paradoxical comfort through Paul's use of παράκλησις (7.4; cf. 1.3-7). But Paul's role is reversed: rather than having a

part in comforting the Corinthians, the community comforts the apostle (v. 6)! The paradox is beginning to take shape in Corinth and, in one of the clearest signs that it works transformation, it produces indignation and longing which contribute to reconciliation with Paul (v. 11). This explains why Paul chastises (v. 1-4) and praises the Corinthians (v. 13-16): the paradox is beginning to develop, but it has not yet saturated the life of the community and thus produced full reconciliation.

The fifth chapter began with a survey of issues relating to 2 Corinthians 10-13. In particular, I note the common conclusion that these chapters exhibit a raging apostle who becomes extremely harsh. But upon observing several places where Paul consoles the community (e.g. 10.1, 9), I note one of the best proofs for the Corinthian polarity: Paul describes the opponents' creation of a shame which underlies the community's pursuit of strength (11.20). In light of Paul's clear reference to multiple rhetorical strategies—especially his admission that he becomes harsher to match the Corinthians' strength (i.e. 10.8)—I conclude that Paul adjusts his tone to match the Corinthians' oscillations between strength and weakness. This re-affirms my decision to treat the opponents as a secondary issue, as Paul clearly holds the community responsible for their actions (e.g. 11.4-6; 12.11). His main focus rests in the Fool's Speech, where the central motif is once again an experience of the strength in weakness paradox (12.1-10).

I begin with the ascent to paradise (v. 1-6), observing that this is a confusing passage not least due to its past nature (v. 2) and Paul's hesitancy to identify himself as the visionary in question (v. 5). Most interpreters understand this episode to be Paul's strategy for matching the Corinthians' boast in strength. But Gooder rightly notes that interpreters generally fail to read the argument in light of Paul's experience of strength in weakness. Building on this insight, I suggest that the passage is actually best read in light of the

Corinthians' polarity: this is a proverb-like tale from Paul's past that is meant to illustrate a wrongful pursuit of strength which is associated with conceit (v. 7a). When combined with the thorn in the flesh, wherein Paul struggles with weakness (v. 8), it is evident that the whole of v. 1-8 is a past narrative which exhibits a grand polarity that expresses solidarity with the community. This draws the community's attention to how the Lord acted to help Paul in the midst of his struggle (v. 9-10).

Following the Lord's word to Paul—'my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness' (v. 9a)—I consider the prevailing views of the paradox's function. The revelatory view emphasizes the acquisition of heavenly knowledge which reveals that God's power is inwardly present amidst outward human weakness. This causes weakness to become a hermeneutical tool which makes power, not more present, but more visible. However, this view seems too narrow—the Corinthians need more than heavenly knowledge to desire reconciliation with Paul. The ontological view initially appears distinctive, with its emphasis on human self-abasement as a pre-requisite to divine strength. In this sense, the paradox is a sequence, not unlike Christ's death and resurrection. But it seems like an insult to tell the pained Corinthians that the solution to their problems is more deprivation. While some interpreters attempt to improve upon the above views by combining them, they simply inherit the same problems. There are even interpreters in each camp—e.g. Hotze, Lambrecht, and Heckel—who think that one must dissolve the paradox to discover its meaning, thus showing inadequate care for the most significant theological construction in 2 Corinthians. Most importantly, each of these views places human and divine strength in a competitive relationship: humanity must decrease so that God may increase. This leads most interpreters, especially Gorman, to suggest that the paradox's goal is human powerlessness.

In response, I offer a reading of the paradox as a transformative reality, where I begin with God's grace (v. 9), which holds an intrusive quality—it both *incongruously* and *effectively* delivers the paradox into Paul's life. Crucially, the Lord's word (v. 9a) comes from Christ, who embodies the grace of God to Paul. The creativity of his proclamation is represented by the use of *τελέω*, which suggests that strength and weakness are interdependent; indeed, this is an articulation of co-inherence where each entity is simulatenously occurring and mutually qualifies one another. Paul begins to trace the subsequent transformation when he uses *οὐν*—showing that paradox is comprehensible as paradox—and suggesting that he learns about Christ's care for the weak. He also receives gladness (v. 9b), an antonym of *λυπ-* words, which shows that he is drawing the Corinthians further into his narrative. Notably, he is not denoting a sequence with his boast in weakness (v. 9b-c); rather, my model of the paradox allows for what I call co-inherent rebound: Paul can call attention to an independent entity (i.e. weakness) yet simultaneously receive strength. This produces a stabilization of Paul's polarity, where he is content with weakness because—as the change in personal pronouns indicates—Christ's strength in weakness paradox has become his own (v. 10). In this sense, both the ontological and revelatory views fail to capture the framework in which the paradox operates: it speaks to a weak apostle *and* his community, and upon receiving it, they experience a comprehensive transformation. This includes a change in one's knowledge, attitude, emotions, and behaviour. Consequently, one of the most important distinctions in my view of the paradox is that, amidst pain, it brings the growth of human potential. Far from representing the displacement of humanity, the paradox allows Paul and the Corinthians to grow more like Christ. This involves a both/and view of divine and human agency: as Christ grows larger in his life, Paul also becomes more like Christ, thus suggesting that the paradox is a re-packaging of Paul's gospel for the Corinthian community.

The impact of the transformation inaugurated by the paradox continues in 12.11-21, a much overlooked passage. Upon identifying how the paradox increases the foolishness of his ministry (v. 11-13), Paul foreshadows a radical change to be enacted in the Corinthians' lives. He turns to the community and proclaims that he loves them, and they should love him too (v. 15). Although few, if any, interpreters relate this love to the paradox, it is certainly a fruit of the paradox because—theologically speaking—love requires both strength and weakness (cf. 1 Cor 13.4-7). Once again, the mutual qualification of strength and weakness (12.9) redeems the Corinthians' polarity, enabling their weakness to become useful humility and their strength to become the sort of intention necessary to reconcile with an apostle as weak as Paul. This leads to 12.19, one of the most underestimated verses in the material, where Paul clarifies that he has not been defending himself; rather, he has been working for the Corinthians' upbuilding. Unfortunately, most interpreters are confused by this passage and offer clarifications to limit its meaning. But the evidence above has made it clear: Paul's *primary* and *overarching* goal is not to defend himself, nor to explain his apostleship. He is radically focused on the transformation of the Corinthian community through the strength in weakness paradox. This is confirmed in 13.1-5, where Paul concludes by becoming even more explicitly focused on the Corinthians. He links the paradox to their faith in Jesus, who experienced the paradox himself in his death and resurrection. Paul seeks the paradoxical manifestation of the Corinthians' faith in Jesus, not least embodied in reconciliation with the apostle himself.

## II. Research Contributions

This thesis considers a substantial portion of 2 Corinthians, offering proposals on the nature of God's grace, the essence of Paul's apostleship, the role of the opponents in the

Corinthian conflict, and the pragmatic difference between God and humanity. But its central, original research contributions are limited to the following:

- 1) The Corinthians experience ongoing pains of despair, heartbreak, and bitterness (2.1-7; 7.5-16), which are actively preventing their reconciliation with Paul (2.1-2; 6.11-13; 7.2).
- 2) The community's pains are implicitly and explicitly addressed by Paul's discourses on strength in weakness given that pain is a *kind* of weakness (e.g. 11.29) and the suggestion that pain was a difficult emotion to solve in antiquity and thus requires the divine intervention granted by the paradox. In other words, the community is not merely 'the strong' (e.g. 10.10; 13.9); they experience weakness as well (e.g. 1.3-7; 2.1-7; 6.11-13).
- 3) The Corinthians' pains form a dynamic—the community's polarity—in which they oscillate between strength and weakness (2.1-7; 10.10; 11.20). This does not occur over long periods of time, covering separate situations; rather, the community is two-sided, showing vindictive strength against Paul yet struggling with pains almost simultaneously. In fact, their pains subtly motivate their claims against the apostle. They understand strength and weakness to be totally opposed and irreconcilable (10.10; 13.9; cf. 7.11).
- 4) This two-sided nature of the community suggests that current partition and unity theories are too simple—both reduce otherwise complex material into a single letter predicated on one theme or a series of predictable missives. Instead, Paul oscillates his tone to match the Corinthians' polarity, comforting them in their weakness (e.g. 1.3-7; 10.9; 12.9-10) and confronting them in their strength (e.g. 1.18-22; 3.1-3; 11.1-6). This reveals the outline of a new unity theory predicated on Paul's sensitivity to the Corinthian polarity.
- 5) Paul's solution for the Corinthian predicament is the strength in weakness paradox (1.3-11; 4.7-15; 6.1-13; 12.9-10), which possesses a *transformative* function through the



relationship that it ultimately establishes between strength and weakness. This relationship is intricate—what I call *co-inherent*—meaning that strength and weakness are opposed yet a) simultaneously occurring and b) mutually qualifying one another (i.e. neither entity is complete without the other). Given the depth of the Corinthians' pains, the paradox remarkably assigns a productive role to weakness without making it *inherently redemptive*.

6) The paradox changes both Paul's and the Corinthians' identity, knowledge of God, emotions, attitude, behaviour, and above all, increases their human potential for living like Christ—i.e. the achievement of *outward-focused vulnerability* (e.g. 1.11; 4.12; 5.14-15). This is in contrast to common readings of the paradox, which envision the diminishment of human power by placing it in a competitive relationship with divine power. However, I suggest that Paul holds a complementary view of divine and human agency, and most importantly, the paradox only maintains its theological integrity if all of its elements are God-given (thus it cannot be a contrast between divine and human power). It is suggested that the paradox moves into the human sphere *via* the God-man, Jesus (13.4; 12.9a).

7) In particular, the paradox enables the ultimate act of strength in weakness: reconciliation with Paul (6.11-13; 12.15). Given that this kind of love requires the simultaneous exercise of strength and weakness (cf. 1 Cor 13.4-7), the paradox's mutually-qualifying nature helpfully transforms the Corinthians' polarity of strength or weakness—i.e. their oscillating experiences of pride or despair—to create humility without self-loathing and intention without self-focused pride. Love is consequently a *synergistic fruit* of the paradox.

8) Finally, my reading of 2 Corinthians suggests that Paul engages more *directly* and *deeply* with the community than previously thought. In fact, all of the above results in a paradigm shift in which 2 Corinthians must not be viewed primarily nor generally as an apologetic or an exposition of the apostleship. Although Paul makes significant apologetic

arguments, these are simply one part of a broader rhetorical strategy meant to confront the Corinthians' strengths and console their weaknesses. Most importantly, Paul's apology is a vehicle, not merely for a sustained relationship with Corinth, but for deeper paradoxical change in the lives of the Corinthians. 2 Corinthians is an intensely pastoral document where Paul routinely speaks of himself to give paradigmatic witness to how Christ can transform the Corinthians' pains through the strength in weakness paradox.

### III. Future Research Directions and Closing Reflections

Given the relatively wide array of claims in this thesis, there are more than several lines of enquiry that can be identified for future researchers. First, this thesis has further developed an overlooked dimension of the Corinthian conflict—λύπη (2.1-7; 7.5-16)—and thus provides a basis upon which interpreters can more closely consider Paul's references to other kinds of emotions and their relationship to pain (e.g. 1.10b; 4.8; 12.15). I have also placed a unique spotlight on Paul's apostleship: rather than simply addressing the community on the basis of his authority, he writes to them as an 'offender' of sorts—being the cause of the community's pains (2.1-4). One could also consider how the community's pains and Paul's strength in weakness argument relate to the collection (e.g. 8.1-9.15). The ontological role of Christ in bringing the strength in weakness paradox into the human sphere (13.4; 12.9) raises questions about Paul's Christology elsewhere in his corpus. In particular, how does Paul move from his more forensic presentation of Christ to one with strength and weakness categories? Also, regarding the paradoxical transformation enacted by Christ, how does this compare to processes of sanctification elsewhere in Paul's corpus? Given that my work has drawn more attention to the paradoxical theology of 2 Corinthians, one wonders whether serious readers of paradox in Paul—such as Luther and Barth—might yield even more significant insights into the apostle's theology than those that could

be mentioned in this thesis. Finally, the development of the apologetic research paradigm into a viewpoint that is exhibited by a wide range of interpreters is a key point of interest. What commonalities in the field's hermeneutical approach might have prevented it from identifying and exploring anomalies to the paradigm within the text of 2 Corinthians?

What can be concluded with certainty, however, is that there is far more strategy and pastoral concern in what many believe to be a wild, almost incomprehensible letter. Strachan famously retorted that Paul's argument 'feels rather than thinks its way' through 2 Corinthians.<sup>979</sup> While Paul is certainly a man of feeling (e.g. 2.1-2; 11.1-6), this thesis has shown that it is the Corinthians who are out of control, losing their identity in a polarity of strength *or* weakness. Paul's response is to construct a new relationship between these two entities based upon the Christ event—strength *in* weakness. Rather than resolving or ignoring the paradox, as so many do, one can discover the coherence of Paul's argument precisely by embracing its complexities. In fact, one finds that within material long thought to lack a distinct Pauline gospel, one emerges plainly into view. Through experiences of strength in weakness given by God's intrusive grace, the Corinthians can be transformed in their experience of pains, receiving new knowledge, emotions, behaviour, and above all, reconciliation with Paul. This represents the growth of their human potential and, ultimately, the redemption of their weaknesses in such a way that they are not *inherently* redemptive; rather, they become fruitful for the Christian life only through their paradoxical congruence with strength. Given that the strength in weakness paradox is the main theological motif in 2 Corinthians, all of the above serves the conclusion that the apologetic research paradigm has misjudged Paul's primary and overarching goal: to transform the Corinthian community through experiences of strength in weakness. In this

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<sup>979</sup> R. H. Strachan, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, Moffat New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), 123.

sense, this thesis resonates with Käsemann's warning that 'Paul will remain incomprehensible as long as his paradoxical praise of tribulation is not taken seriously'.<sup>980</sup>

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<sup>980</sup> Ernst Käsemann, 'The Pauline Theology of the Cross', *Interpretation* 24, no. 2 (April 1970):151-177 [157].

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