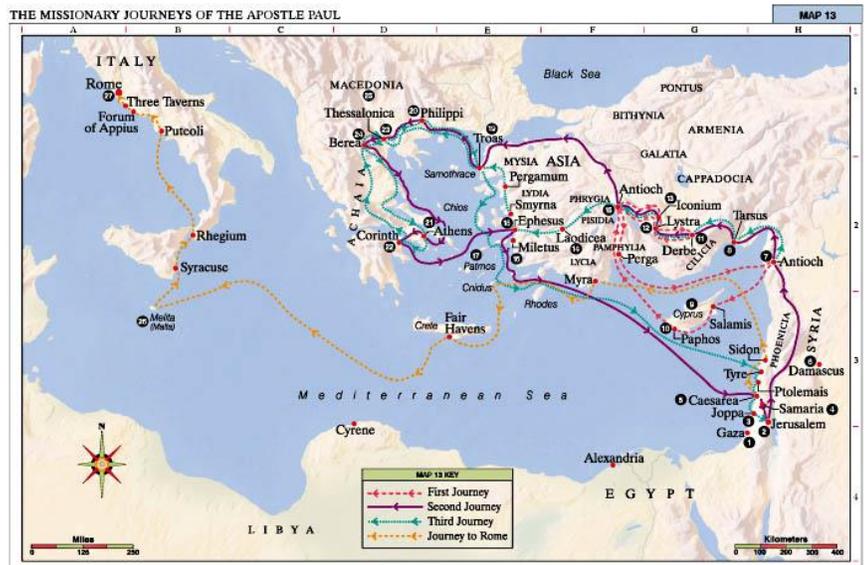




PAULINE EPISTLES



2 CORINTHIANS - Paul's defense of Cruciform Ministry

Paul attempts to reconcile with the Corinthians to reconcile them ultimately with God. There are three distinct components to this letter: Chap 1-7; Chap 8-9; Chap 10-13. Dated to mid-50s (54-57) from Macedonia.

According to Acts 18-20, after Paul established the Church in Corinth, he returned to Antioch and then embarked upon his third missionary journey. 1 COR may not have been Paul's first letter, because in 1 COR he mentions a previous letter. Additionally, a "harsh" letter is mentioned which was written after a painful visit. Paul's letters to the Corinthians are possibly: **A** - the missing letter mentioned in 1 COR; **B** 1 COR; **C** - the missing harsh letter; and **D** - 2 COR.

C, the harsh letter, resulted in the Corinthian community expressing deep regret, dealing with the offender, and renewing affection for Paul. Titus reported this to Paul in Macedonia, which is included in 2 COR.

2 COR Chap 8-9 - the COR had promised to donate to the collection for the impoverished Church in Jerusalem. Paul used this news to prompt the poorer Church in Macedonia to donate lavishly. Paul now reminds the COR of their promise and send Titus (known to and respected by the COR) and a member of the Macedonian church to prompt the COR to make good on their promise.

2 COR Chap 10-13 - the Foolish Speech and Paul's defense of his ministry against Jewish Christian pneumatics (Spirit people, whom Paul sarcastically termed "super-apostles").

Chap 1-7 are conciliatory in tone and explanatory in purpose, an example of forensic rhetoric

Chap 8-9 are hortatory in tone and motivational in purpose, an example of deliberative rhetoric

Chap 10-13 are polemical in tone and dissuasive and persuasive in purpose, a blend of forensic and deliberative rhetoric to edify COR through self-examination

There is a rhetorical strategy of moving from issues of lesser to greater sensitivity and from less combative to more combative forms of persuasion. Paul's strategy is to (1) cement the reconciliation with the COR; (2) by following through on their financial pledge; and (3) separating themselves from the false apostles.

The ultimate focus is the cruciform shape of life in Christ. Paul desires to know nothing - and to boast in nothing - but Christ Crucified. Cruciformity is the shape of apostleship, grace, and the Spirit.

1:3-11 and 13:13 - beginning and end - *Inclusio* - bookends - Trinitarian benediction

1:3-7:16: The Cruciform Apostleship of Reconciliation uses the rhetorical device of *narratio* to tell the story of Paul's relationship with COR in the larger context of their relationship with Jesus

1:3-11 - God consoles the afflicted - a treatise on consolation in suffering since life in Christ is about affliction and suffering, troubles and endurance, God grants comfort and graces through His Spirit and through the partnership of mutual care in the Christian community. God is merciful and consoling by nature. Those who receive God's blessings are to be conduits of grace to others and not contain the grace in themselves only. Affliction and consolation are a participation in Christ - a fellowship (*koinonia*), a sharing in others' affections and comforts. Paul has been undergoing "unendurable affliction" in Asia, so extreme that he and his fellow ministers had expected death. God delivered Paul, renewing his trust in God and yielding praises.

1:12-2:13 - Paul accepts the renewal of affections from the COR after his harsh letter, offers them his forgiveness, and approves that they have rebuked the one who offended him; he offers his forgiveness to the offender as well. Paul stresses the interdependence between his ministerial team and the COR. They will be each other's source of pride at the parousia. Paul had planned a second visit to COR which had to be put off and then sent a letter instead.

In Christ, all of God's promises are a Yes. This is Paul's governing hermeneutic, his way of reading Scripture and history. All of God's promises are fulfilled in Jesus. The purpose of this letter was reconciliation, yet he had heard about these false apostles turning the heads and hearts of the COR and so Paul had to speak the truth to them in love. Paul offers this love to the offending party of the harsh letter out of good for relations between him and Paul and him and God, but also for the good of the community, as excessive sorrow can be an open door for Satan.

2:14-6:10 - Cruciformity and reconciliation: the character of Paul's ministry - Paul shifts into an explanation of his ministry of the centrality of the Cross and reconciliation, placing this within the context of God's reconciling work in Jesus. Paul uses two governing metaphors: (1) the Roman imperial triumphal procession and (2) the aroma of the knowledge of Christ. (1) Paul and his co-workers are paraded through the world like weak captives sentenced to death; this procession is the spread of the gospel in word and in cruciform life. (2) The aroma of the knowledge of Jesus disperses throughout the world - aroma like incense which implies sacrifice. Paul asks "Who is qualified?" for such work - the answer: those with a Divine commission and accountability. Paul's point is that a weak captive under a death sentence and one with a Divine commission would be sincere.

3:1-18 - Ministry of the New Covenant - the COR are Paul's letters of recommendation to other churches being established. This letter is a visible, public reality, the subject of which is Jesus, prepared by Paul with the "ink" of the Holy Spirit; this Spirit is inscribed on the hearts of the COR. This Trinitarian description evokes JER and EZEK - a new Spirit put into hearts of flesh - has now been fulfilled in Christ. Paul praises the New Covenant because of its surpassing greatness and glory against the already glorious Old Covenant. This is Paul as a Jew describing the fulfillment of his Jewish hopes for a New Covenant, which is different from and far superior to the Old, for the law is written on our hearts - internalized - and begets an indwelling of the living God. The NC came through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and Paul's suffering and daily dying are an extension of Christ's. **Key word** in this passage: **Glory**. Those who proclaim the NC do so with boldness, highlighting its glory, in

comparison with Moses, who had to keep his face veiled, as the Glory of the Lord shining upon his face frightened the Israelites.

Paul makes the point that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God (the Father, Yahweh) and Jesus the Son. Those who gaze upon the image and glory of God are transformed into the Divine Image. Paul experiences this Spirit-giving God as Triune: (1) the God of Israel is fully revealed in Jesus, the Son; (2) the Spirit of the Son is also the Spirit of the Father; (3) to have the Spirit of God within is also to have the Spirit of the Son in this new Spirit-centered Covenant.

4:1-5:10 - Courage and confidence in cruciform ministry - Paul works in a ministry characterized by weakness - treasure in earthen vessels - to contrast the value of the treasure and the fragility of the vessel. Despite the afflictions, Paul does not lose hope because of the Spirit and the certainty of future glory. His ministry was given to him by Jesus Himself; as long as Paul acts and speaks with honesty and integrity, spending himself in the service of the Lord, Paul is not ashamed. He takes on the form of a slave in conformity to Christ, for he sees the combination of a life of suffering and the reward of glory. Paul's earthen vessel has been subject to affliction, but his spirit has not been crushed; he has been perplexed, but not driven to despair; he has been persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. His sufferings are a continuation of the death and resurrection of the Lord - a death which engenders life. Cruciform ministry makes Jesus' life visible: death in life, power in weakness. Paul's suffering is not for his own future glory alone, but for the good of the communities for which he prays. Participation in Jesus' death is a prelude to participation in His Resurrection. Paul is convinced that (1) our bodies' temporary, mortal states will give way to a glorified, permanent state; and (2) present suffering will be repaid by future glory. (1) Paul refutes the notion that the body is a tomb from which the soul must escape. Our mortal bodies will decay; the glorified body will not. (2) Paul refutes that suffering is final, although it is inescapable. Suffering is slight compared with the glory to come. The Spirit is our guarantee of our future life of glory as we transform into the likeness of Jesus. Both stages involve pleasing the Lord and seeking to do His Will, helping and loving one another in an ongoing life of cruciform apostleship.

5:11-6:10 - the message of reconciliation - the heart matters more to Paul than outward appearances. Everything Paul has done has been for the good of the COR. Paul is motivated by Christ's love which was expressed in His life and in His death. (1) Motive - Christ's death was an act of love; (2) Scope - Christ died for all; (3) Purpose - Christ died for the benefit of all so that we would live no longer for ourselves, but in Christ; (4) Effects - **all** have died in Christ; a new creation has begun; the New Age has dawned; we are reconciled with God and forgiven; (5) Ultimate source: God the Father, Who sent Jesus; (6) Mode: sinless Christ became sin for our sake.

When Paul says "**all**," he most likely means "all Christians who have responded to and benefited by Christ's death and share in His Cross." If Paul meant *all people*, he would hardly be so motivated to evangelize, nor would he press so hard for reconciliation with God, nor would he speak so passionately about humanity outside of Christ who live for themselves at enmity with God, guilty of trespasses, identified with sin.

Jesus died as an act **for** others means: for our benefit AND in our place. Christ did not simply offer forgiveness of sins so that we could keep on sinning. We should look to Him and follow in His footsteps. This is the new creation inaugurated by Christ's death. The community in Christ is the beginning of the prophetic promises for the renewal of creation (ISA 40-66). We cease to see the world through human standards and begin to use the Cross as the criteria for our evaluation. Paul notes that COR listening to false apostles after having received the Gospel from him is evidence of their need for reconciliation with God.

Paul lists the character of his ministry (1) tribulations/cruciformity; (2) virtues/integrity; and (3) paradoxes (life in death, power in weakness. The words he uses for (1) endurance, affliction, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleeplessness; hunger. For (2): purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness, genuine love, truthful speech, power of God with the weapons of righteousness. For (3): honor and dishonor; ill repute and good repute; treated as imposters, yet true; unknown yet well-known; dying yet alive; punished, not killed; sorrowful yet rejoicing; poor yet enriching others; having nothing yet possessing everything. He and his co-workers have met the ultimate test: conformity to Christ by carrying about in their bodies the death of Jesus and making visible His life.

6:11-7:16 - final appeal for reconciliation - These chapters demonstrate that Paul's relationship with COR has been a microcosm of his cruciform ministry; they constitute the basis for the appeal for reconciliation. Paul vividly describes his love for them. He mentions body parts which were considered sources of affection in antiquity: mouth, heart, and *splanchna*, bowels. He refers to his as open to them, freely and frankly. He believes the COR have restriction in their bowels and need to open up to receive him again as their father in faith. He calls them to a radical holiness and advises them to avoid being "unequally yoked" - married to unbelievers. Paul warns COR against associating with false apostles who proclaim a different Jesus, Spirit and gospel. He calls these false apostles "Beliar," another name for Stn. Paul rejoices that the harsh letter he sent had the desired result, although he is grieved that it caused them pain; but this pain was "godly" in that it led to repentance, renewed zeal, and reconciliation with the church with Paul and God.

Summary of 2 COR 1-7 - (1) Believers participate in a partnership of tribulation and comfort by sharing in the sufferings of Jesus and the comfort of God the Father. (2) Ministerial faithfulness and integrity are founded on God's faithfulness in Christ. (3) True ministers are characterized by sincerity and cruciform love. (4) Always carrying about in your bodies the death of Christ is a display of God's power of resurrection, as Jesus' life and Resurrection benefits all believers. (5) This present life of suffering pales in comparison with the future glory. (6) Ministry with integrity is characterized by difficulty, virtue, and paradox.

8:1-9:15: Cruciform grace of generosity - Paul mentions the collection for the impoverished church in Jerusalem is mentioned in four of his letters: ROM, GAL, and 1 and 2 COR and he made extensive efforts in at least three regions: Galatia, Macedonia, and Achaia. While the COR had made promises to donate to the collection, Paul was not sure they would follow through and he wasn't sure those in Jerusalem would appreciate it (possibly because of the reputation of COR?) Paul was anxious for COR to donate to promote unity between Gentile and Jewish Christians; so the Gentile believers could acknowledge their spiritual debt to Jewish believers; to embody the gospel of God's gift and Christ's sacrifice concretely; and to create a sense of the catholicity of all communities in Christ. Paul uses words like fellowship, partnership, service, ministry, overflow, zeal, eagerness, and especially grace (*charis*) to prove the reality of God's love and grace in their lives. **Grace is central** in these chapters: the grace of God; the grace of gratitude; the grace of giving; using the word grace to mean thanksgiving.

8:1-24: Paul describes the incredible generosity of the Macedonian churches, who were poorer than COR but heard of the pledges COR had made; their zeal overflowed and they provided out of their own need during a time of grave ordeal. They were so joyful to have received the Gospel that they begged to participate in the collection (such a ministry of God's grace). This was proof of the Spirit at work in the Macedonians. Paul stresses the abundance of spiritual gifts and God's grace as the COR were proud of their spiritual gifts to the point of flaunting them like a party game. Paul stresses the great love of the Macedonians, seeming to wonder if COR can show such love. Paul speaks of the Incarnation and death of Jesus, whose love urges us on, for although He was rich, He became poor for our sakes, so that by His poverty, we might become rich. This echoes Paul in 2 COR 5:21 - God made the sinless One to be sin so that we could become God's righteousness. Jesus' spending Himself on us is His grace, His love, the means of salvation for COR. Grace is experienced as grace only when it is

extended to others - we must be conduits, not containers. God gives us what we need - calling to mind EX 16:18 - Israelites collected only what manna they needed, some more (for larger families) and some less (for smaller families) - none had too little or too much.

9:1-15 - The boasting promises of COR had motivated the Macedonians; now Paul is sending Titus and a member of the Macedonian church to manage the Jerusalem collection in COR. Paul advises that their gifts should be offered liberally and cheerfully. God will provide for those who are generous (the measure you use will be measured out to you); such generosity is an act of ministry and worship (*diakonia* and *leitourgia*).

Summary of 2 COR 8-9 - a brief but comprehensive theology of generosity: (1) generous giving is an experience of Divine grace - expressing thanksgiving for graces received and a means to conform to the generous self-giving of Jesus; (2) giving should be done liberally and cheerfully; (3) God supplies the needs of the generous; (4) generosity demonstrates the reality of grace.

10:1-13:13 - Cruciform power in weakness of the Spirit - This is one of the most rhetorically and theologically powerful portions of all of the Pauline epistles. It's a no-holds-barred defense of Paul's ministry and his attack on the opponents. The fundamental problem with the false apostles is that they are so thoroughly antithetical of the message of Christ Crucified as to be demonic. The hallmark of the Spirit and thus of true apostles is power in weakness, the Spirit of Christ Crucified, Who is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Paul boasts only in the Lord, in his own weakness; his cruciform ministry is obedience to Christ.

10:1-6 Paul declares war - while he desires to deal with COR with Christ's meekness and gentleness, he declares spiritual warfare on the false apostles. He comes with Divinely-empowered weapons to engage in destruction, captivity, and punishment of resistance. He will destroy the arguments of the false apostles, take captive the thoughts and hearts of COR to the Lord, and punish any residual resistance. War is necessary - the false apostles are leading COR away from God; they have "poached" on the Lord's territory, which God had assigned to Paul. Paul uses military imagery to oppose those who contradict the Cross, the only true means to peace and reconciliation. This is the only kind of war Paul is willing to wage - a holy war of words.

10:7-18 - This letter is for the edification of COR; he exercises his apostolic authority on their behalf. His primary weapon will be boasting in the Lord (JER 9:23-24), using the boasting of the false apostles against them. Paul rejects self-commendation and self-praise to boast in the cruciform shape of his life. The only legitimate pride is in obeying the Lord, being conformed to His self-humbling and weakness.

11:1-15 - Paul, as the COR father in faith, has the responsibility of a daughter's pure devotion to her husband to her betrothed until their wedding day. Since COR is the Bride of Christ, the wedding day will be the parousia. Paul's problem with the false apostles is that they preach "another Jesus, a different Spirit, a different gospel." Since Paul had preached the authentic Gospel, both Christ and the Spirit live in COR believers. To disassociate the powerful, resurrected Jesus from the crucified Christ is to preach another Jesus. To separate the Spirit of God from the Spirit of cruciformity is to preach a different Spirit. To abandon Christ Crucified and His God-given Spirit of cruciformity is to preach a different gospel. This necessary confluence of cruciformity and apostleship leads Paul to speak of his weakness. (1) lack of showy rhetoric - shows the power of God in converting COR operating through Paul's weakness. Paul claims to possess true knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Here the false apostles reveal their true lack of knowledge of God. (2) working with his hands (manual labor) and not taking money for his apostleship - the false apostles were happy to take the COR money. Paul was happy to follow his Lord in voluntary self-humbling. Paul, motivated by love, lowered himself for the exaltation of COR. (3) Paul will continue this method of ministry because of the false apostles so as not to lower himself to their level, calling them "enemies of the Cross" opponents of the gospel, deceitful workers, ministers of Stn the deceiver. While this is standard rhetorical fare in antiquity, Paul means for COR to take it seriously.

11:16-12:10 - the Fool's Speech - the most potent section of these four rhetorically and theologically powerful chapters. Paul lets loose with an impressive rhetorical arsenal: sarcasm and invective, self-praise and self-denigration, irony and paradox, *synkrisis* (comparison) and antithesis, narrative and catalog. He parodies the arrogance and pride of the false apostles. Paul boasts of his powerful feats and military successes, so common an occupation in Roman life - but Paul's achievements were failures according to human standards. He boasts in the Lord, whose power manifests in Paul's weakness and whose Life is visible in Paul's daily dying. The *propositio* of his speech is "whenever I am weak, then I am strong" - that God's foolishness and weakness in the Cross of Jesus are manifested in Paul's ministry. COR have tolerated the "birds of prey" who take their money in the name of Jesus; the issue of Paul refusing to take COR money was obviously a central issue. Paul then takes on the opponents on their own boasts: if they are Jewish, so is Paul (and better!) If they are apostles, so is Paul (and better!) Paul then catalogs their tribulations and his - and he wins, by a landslide. Paul "the warrior" summarizes his service:

Uncounted tribulations - years of hard labor; imprisonments; floggings; and near-death experiences.

Enumerated adversities - 5 times officially flogged at synagogues, each of which could have been lethal; 3 times beaten by Romans; stoned once and left for dead; 3 shipwrecks; once adrift at sea; and frequent dangerous trips

Dangers - most related to the dangerous trips, both natural dangers (rivers, seas, wilderness) and bandits, mobs of Jews and Gentiles, and false brothers and sisters

Difficult conditions - physical pains and deprivations; hard work (manual labor); sleeplessness; hunger and thirst; exposure to the elements.

Anxiety for the churches - daily anxiety and a deep sense of sharing in the persecutions and weaknesses of the churches he established.

Paul boasts of his weakness is being let down in a basket from the walls of Damascus to escape King Aretas IV. Warriors boast of being the first to scale the walls of a city they attack: they receive a *corona muralis*, a "crown for the wall." Paul paradoxically boasts of the power of God in saving him by letting him down the wall. This is his *corona muralis*.

Paul then narrates a "heavenly trip" which he took not long after the Damascus escape, a vision experience called *Merkabah*, Hebrew for "chariot," mystical encounters with God. Paul does not describe what he saw and was not permitted to describe what he heard, but his experience was stunning. While the false apostles claimed to have visions, Paul beats them at this game as well. This was not his only vision; he had others equally stunning. For this reason, Paul says, he was given a "thorn (in) or (against) his flesh" to inculcate humility and dependence on God. According to the Dead Sea Scrolls, this thorn was Paul's opponents. Paul terms the thorn both a "messenger of Stn" due to its adversarial character AND that it was "given to" him, as a Divine gift. The thorn may be the life of tribulation he faces as an apostle. He has the privilege of participating in the suffering of Christ - a Divine gift, yet the tribulations are the work of the adversary. These trials teach Paul the power of God's grace in his times of weakness and need and allow him to experience Jesus' power. He is now content to abide with the thorn. The Damascus incident was his first experience of God's power and came to accept that tribulations were the essence of an apostolic life. The thorns keep ministers from becoming too elated - the thorn *against* the flesh is a help *for* the Spirit. The God of Paradise is revealed in the Cross of Jesus and in the cruciformity of His ministers. Paul, then, possessed an "extraordinary power" from God by which the life of Jesus is manifested in his affliction and persecution.

12:11-13 - Conclusion to the Speeches - COR did not know how good they had it in their apostle, Paul; they lacked nothing - mighty works, mighty preaching, perhaps miracles, certainly the joy of the Truth revealed to them - everything except the burden of having to support him. Paul sarcastically remarks: Forgive me this wrong! Paul spent himself (economic language) for love of COR.

12:14-13:13 Final Summary, Warnings, Appeals, and Greetings - Paul has been playing both defense and prosecution (against the false apostles). Now he prosecutes COR to discipline his wayward children. He wants them, not their money - and he wants them only for the Lord. He loves them in a godlike, Christlike way. His defensive tone dominates the letter (except when he is being offensive). He fears that as COR are taken in by the false apostles, they will fall away from the true Gospel. He warns of a third visit, which could mean a visit of Divine justice administered through Paul. He can and he will exercise his Divinely-granted authority to discipline his children. The living Christ cannot be repudiated in His church without consequence.

The essence of being the church is to be indwelt by Christ; proof of that reality is a cruciform life as preached and lived by Paul and his missionary team. COR should rally around Paul's admonitions in a spirit of peace and unity with the mind of Christ.

The Trinitarian benediction which concludes the letter echoes the Trinitarian benediction which began the letter - a nice *inclusio*, bookend technique. The *koinonia* - fellowship, communion - created by the Spirit among believers is known most fully in the sharing of suffering and consolation and in the sharing of resources. Believers participate in the Lord's grace of generosity and in His all-sufficient powerful grace in times of weakness. The One True God known in God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the one Spirit of the Father and the Son have been experienced in COR and ought to be celebrated.