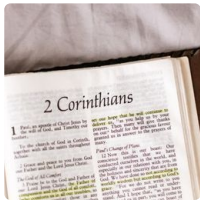


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2 Corinthians (Introduction)



2 Corinthians - Steve Gregg

In this introduction to 2 Corinthians, Steve Gregg highlights some of the background knowledge that he lacks in order to properly understand Paul's letters to the Corinthians. He discusses one theory that suggests that Paul wrote the letter in defense of his apostleship and to advocate for avoidance of fornicators and idolaters. However, the exact relationship between the first nine chapters and the following chapters 10-13 remains a mystery. Gregg also notes that the letter addresses issues of disunity and immorality within the church, although the exact nature of these issues is not always clear.

Transcript

I have always really loved the book of 2 Corinthians and I'm looking forward to teaching it at this time, but I have also always found it to be full of difficulty, and the difficulty has a number of causes. One of them is that although it is one of the most personal epistles Paul wrote, perhaps the most personal, and he says much more about himself and his feelings and his travels and just about personal matters, or at least alludes to them, that you feel like you get to know the heart of Paul by reading this epistle more than most of his epistles. And so there is a disclosure of Paul himself in this epistle.

Whatever else may be said for obscurity, we get a lot of clarity on what kind of man he was and what kinds of things he went through and how he responded to various kinds of problems and what he internally struggled with. That is something unusual about the letter in a positive sense, but he is writing the epistle as he wrote the first epistle of Corinthians to people with whom he had spent a great deal of time. When he came to Corinth on his second missionary journey and founded the church there, he remained there for 18 months.

And during that time, of course, he taught and he preached probably daily, which means that the Corinthian Christians had had a lot of information about what Paul's views were and what he wanted to get across directly from his own conversations, and we don't have any of those recorded. And so we lack a lot of the background knowledge that was shared between Paul and his congregation in Corinth when he wrote the letters. And

when he wrote both the letters, he did allude to things which he expected his readers to know more about than we actually know about because of his recent and prior and extended visit and teaching among them before.

In 1 Corinthians, there are many allusions to things that we can't make much sense of. There are some things in Paul's discussion about women's head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11 that we just don't know what it means, that a woman ought to have authority on her head because of the angels. There's no explanation of that.

Probably in Paul's teaching among the Corinthians, he had said enough on similar subjects or on that subject that they could put it together and know what he was saying. Likewise, when he referred to those who were baptized for the dead in 1 Corinthians 15, again, no one knows for sure what he's referring to there, but the Corinthians certainly must have known. Likewise, in 2 Corinthians, there's a lot of allusions to activities and persons, not so much theological concepts here or ethics as in 1 Corinthians, but more stuff that has gone under the, you know, things that have transpired since he wrote 1 Corinthians that he's alluding back to.

And scholars have made an effort to try to patch together a picture of what transpired between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians from scattered allusions and obscure statements that Paul has made in this epistle. Especially in the first eight chapters, there are quite a few of these sections where Paul breaks away from what he's saying and gives a little bit of allusion to what has gone on and which the Corinthians could make sense of. Now, we can make some degree of sense of it, but there's much that we don't know about that has to be speculated about.

Fortunately, of course, a full understanding of those things that transpired between Paul and his readers is not the most important thing for us to know. It's a matter of curiosity, and it may well provide some clarity on passages of a teaching sort that would be understood in light of those experiences, but I just want to say that it's somewhat difficult because you'll encounter in the first several chapters repeated allusions to things that have gone on in the recent past which are not the easiest thing in the world to put together and figure it all out. Another thing that has made this epistle difficult is Paul's use of certain phrases that are unusual.

He doesn't express himself sometimes as clearly in 2 Corinthians as he does in some other places. Perhaps because he is being more personal and less formal, he may just not be taking as much pain to speak either in grammatical Greek that would be easier to follow his train of thought, or it may be that he's rambling sometimes, and he does appear to do that a little bit, or it may also be that he's using idioms that we're not acquainted with. An example of what I'm talking about would be, and we'll certainly find many of such examples in 2 Corinthians, in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 where he says in verse 18, for example, But God is faithful, let's start at 17, therefore when I was thus

planning, did I do it lightly? For the things that I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be yes, yes, and no, no? But as God is faithful, our word to you was not yes and no.

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, by me, Silvanus, and Timothy, was not yes and no, but in him was yes. For all the promises of God, in him are yes, and in him amen to the glory of God through us. Now, I think I know what Paul is saying there.

What I don't know is why he said it quite that way. I mean, the sentence structure is peculiar, and the uses of the yeses and the noes is not real natural to our way of reading what Paul is saying. Now, it's possible that there's some idiomatic use of some ancient Greek idiom that Paul and his readers are very acquainted with and we are not, but that makes it a little more difficult at times to understand exactly what he's saying.

And my problem, and I have some problems in teaching that maybe some other people would not who have a different style of teaching, but I'm an analytical kind of person. I like to know why this phrase is in this particular sentence and how that phrase is called for by the previous phrases and how it introduces or anticipates the following phrases. I like to see a logical train of thought and see the flow and see how the previous verse or the previous phrase helps give clarity about a present verse or phrase I'm looking at.

And when Paul does this kind of thing, it's more difficult to do that. Now, that doesn't mean the way that I teach is the best way or the only way, but that's just the way my mind works, and it makes it sometimes difficult when I can't figure out why did Paul choose that phrase, exactly what does that mean? And there's more in 2 Corinthians like that. It doesn't mean that his message is inscrutable.

Like I said, the passage I just read, I believe I could paraphrase and get the meaning of it without much difficulty. It's not so much a difficulty of knowing his meaning, it's a difficulty of knowing why he said it that way. Now, some people don't ever worry themselves about why someone said something that way.

That's just a problem I have. I'm always trying to figure out why did he say it that way and what was the significance of saying it that way as opposed to saying it some other way, and some of that is impossible for me to discern. I'm just trying to think of another instance here of that kind of language.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 7, verse 10, for godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted, but the sorrow of the world produces death. Actually, this has some of that phraseology, but the one I was thinking of more is chapter 2. Let me see where we would have it. Let's do verse 15 and following.

2 Corinthians chapter 2, verse 15 says, For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among

those who are being saved, among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death to death, and to the other the aroma of life to life. Now, I don't think I have any problem understanding what Paul is getting at here, but when he uses the expression of death to death and of life to life, it's an unusual phraseology, but it's not unlike Paul.

In fact, in Romans, Paul uses some phrases that are similar, that people speculate, and a lot of translators have done a lot of different imaginative things trying to render them understandable. In Romans 1, verse 17, Paul says, But in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. What does from faith to faith mean? Well, you might think you know, but if you do, you've got one opinion, and there are translators who have a lot of opinions about what that means.

And they'll usually suggest in their commentaries or in their translations what they think it means. But the fact remains that Paul uses idioms or choices of phrases, which might have been very natural of understanding to his audience given their culture, but are to my mind, sometimes difficult. But at the same time, while I say this about his choice of phrases, and that's one thing that's always made 2 Corinthians a little difficult for me, it's not so much, as I say, difficult in knowing what Paul's trying to get across.

That's not the problem. And what Paul's trying to get across is much more important than analytical questions of why he used that phrase and what the specific significance of a given wording might be. I need to give you some background for this letter.

I mean, it's obviously going to be necessary because Paul makes allusions to certain things throughout the letter, and they are not in some kind of a systematized order where he would just sit down and tell what the background was. He put it together from various fragments. And this has to do with part of the whole complex of Paul's relationship to the Corinthian church.

After he had left the Corinthian church, he had written 1 Corinthians to them. Well, actually, even before he did that, he wrote another letter that was prior to 1 Corinthians. We just don't have it.

He wrote a letter that was advocating the avoidance of people who were fornicators and who were idolaters. And he mentions this in 1 Corinthians, chapter 5 and verse 9. He says, I wrote to you in an epistle. He's talking about a previous letter that he had written before 1 Corinthians, which epistle is unfortunately now lost.

But we can see that the letter we call 1 Corinthians is really the second letter Paul wrote to them, because in that first letter, chapter 5, verse 9, he actually makes reference to a prior epistle. Now, there is belief among most scholars, although some would disagree, that 2 Corinthians makes reference to a previous epistle, which is neither to be identified with 1 Corinthians or the epistle before that. Let me show you what I mean.

Chapter 2, verse 3, Paul says, And I wrote this very thing to you, lest when I came I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy. Now, he makes reference to having written to them. And there are several references throughout 2 Corinthians to the letter that he has written to them.

He says also in chapter 2, verse 9, For this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. Now, this reference back to him writing previously could be, of course, a reference to one of his previous epistles that we know of. The very first epistle that was lost, or probably more probably, would be the epistle we call 1 Corinthians.

But there are some things he says about this letter that he wrote that have made many scholars believe that 1 Corinthians is not easily identified with it. And that the whole flavor of the epistle he is referring to does not jive with the flavor of 1 Corinthians. And the content of it does not jive with the content of 1 Corinthians.

And that being so, many have come to the conclusion that there was yet another now lost epistle that Paul wrote to the Corinthians between 1 and 2 Corinthians. On this theory, of course, Paul wrote a total of four letters to the Corinthians. And we have only had survived to our time the second and the fourth of them.

The first and the third of them now being lost. Now, there doesn't seem to be any question that there was a first letter before 1 Corinthians. And therefore, some scholars speak of these letters as Corinthians A, Corinthians B, Corinthians C, and Corinthians D. Four letters of Paul to the Corinthians.

And 1 Corinthians would actually be Corinthians B. And 2 Corinthians would be Corinthians D. And lost today are Corinthians A and Corinthians C. Now, you don't have to buy those labels or anything like that, but that's simply a way of trying to illustrate that there's some letters written in between that are no longer available to us. There are some who think that Corinthians C, which on this theory is the letter written between 1 and 2 Corinthians, has been preserved in part in a peculiar way. Because after 2 Corinthians chapter 9, there's a radical shift in the tone of the letter.

2 Corinthians chapters 1 through 9 are very upbeat, full of rejoicing, full of relief. Paul makes reference in these chapters to having been deeply concerned about considerations of the Corinthian church's situation. But now he's relieved.

He wrote the second letter to the Corinthians because of his relief and to basically re-establish good relations after there had been some friction there. So that the letter in chapters 1 through 9 is very upbeat. But when you get to chapter 10 and the last four chapters, 10 through 13, you find it's very defensive, very angry, very defensive.

Did I say that already? Very sarcastic at times. And Paul exhibits tremendous, I don't

know if I want to use the word hostility, but that might be the right word, toward certain people in the Corinthian church who apparently are challenging his apostolic authority, who are making themselves out to be apostles of a greater stature than Paul. Even calling themselves super-apostles is the language that occurs in the Greek.

And they are accusing Paul of a great number of things. And he writes with great severity in chapters 10 through 13, and he defends his apostleship, he gives us much autobiographical information about the things he's suffered, and he takes some pretty harsh swipes at these false apostles. Which, by the way, I don't say that critically.

I think Paul's entirely entitled to do that. I think it's the right thing for him to do. But what I'm observing is that it's an entirely different tone in chapters 10 through 13 than you have in the first nine chapters.

In chapters 1 through 9, you don't even have a clue that Paul's going to at some point turn a corner and start lambasting somebody. He's just really thankful and rejoicing and relieved and pleased. And then all of a sudden everything changes in chapter 10.

Now, there are two theories about trying to explain this difference in the tone. One is that Paul had essentially thought he finished the letter, and he'd written up through chapter 9. And perhaps that was all he intended to write, and perhaps was preparing to send it. But he received a report from Corinth that there had been a new outbreak of opposition.

When he was writing chapters 1 through 9, he was rejoicing that all opposition that he had formerly experienced in Corinth was now a thing of the past. Everyone was happy. Everyone was loyal to him and everything.

But that before he could even send the letter off, he got this news of a new development, and he needed to write, as it were, a lengthy appendix or almost another entire letter of rebuke to the false apostles. And that letter is what we find in chapters 10 through 13. Now, that's one theory.

In other words, Paul wrote the letter initially planning to express one thing, but by the time he got through chapter 9, news had arrived that made it necessary for him to take another tack and express something entirely different. And he ended up sending both together. Now, that's possible.

Another possibility that has been suggested is that chapters 10 through 13 were not originally part of this epistle. And by some confusion in the ancient preservation of these letters of Paul, these chapters came to be attached at the end of 2 Corinthians. That actually 2 Corinthians originally ended with chapter 9, and that through the collecting of Paul's epistles one way or another, the scribes or whoever collected them, by accident or whatever, attached chapters 10 through 13 to the end.

Now, the question is not whether 10 through 13 are authentic letters from Paul, but some have suggested that these chapters may actually contain the, what we call, the epistles of Paul. The epistles of what we could call Corinthians C. That is the third epistle which has been allegedly lost. The epistle that Paul alludes back to in the early part of 2 Corinthians.

And the argument is that the contents and tone of these chapters, 10 through 13, are very much like what Paul alludes back to as a previous epistle. In chapters 2 and 7 and places like that. Now, there are very much arguments for and against this suggestion, and it might be the matter of least interest to you to decide this matter.

I'm simply bringing it up because you will find a change of tone, and there are various ways that people have tried to explain that change. All told, the arguments against this second theory are probably stronger than the arguments for it. And I don't have time to go into the arguments, because frankly, I don't think they're that important.

I'm not bringing this up because I think it's of utmost importance, but because it is something that people who write on 2 Corinthians and who study it deal with. So, this much we can say, there's a marked change of tone between chapters 9 and 10. And in chapters 10 through 13, Paul is again defending his apostleship in a way that you do not at all anticipate him doing in the first nine chapters.

Or, in the first nine chapters, the scene is such that you expect he'd never have to do that again in Corinth. But he obviously does. So, again, some have felt that Paul, after writing the first nine chapters, may have received new information requiring him to change directions in the epistle and to add chapters 10 through 13 by way of rebuke and to try to put out another fire that had flared up there since he had begun writing.

Some have suggested that chapters 10 through 13 actually are part of, or the entirety of, the lost epistle that he alludes back to in the earlier chapters. And simply by some mistake in the collection of Paul's epistle somewhere back there, someone accidentally attached it where they did so that it's come down to us as part of 2 Corinthians. There is, of course, another possibility, and that's that Paul intended right from the very beginning to make the points he makes in chapters 10 through 13, but wanted to be gentle at first and rejoice and say, you know, not everything he has to say is bad.

He does have some harsh things to say in chapters 10 through 13, but he may have felt that before he dumped on, he wanted to express his rejoicing and his pleasure with them about an earlier situation. The hardest thing about that is that you will definitely find reason in the first chapters of the epistle to feel that Paul is, at the time of writing, pleased with them. He's pleased that they've shown their loyalty and so forth.

But now, in chapters 10 through 13, he doesn't seem pleased at all. So, there is a bit of a mystery there as to what the exact relationship is between the first nine chapters and

that section that follows, chapters 10 through 13. Certainly, there's nothing there that would impugn our confidence in them as legitimate writings of Paul.

It's just not clear exactly what the relationship of those chapters was originally, if they originally stood in their present position vis-à-vis the earlier chapters or whether they were later or earlier documents that came to be attached to it, too. We will not worry ourselves about that too much, but I do think it would be negligent for me not to point out to you that slight problem. Now, what I want to do is tell you something about Paul's opponents and the accusations they were making about him.

Now, these opponents largely, of course, come into view in these last chapters, 10 through 13. Whether they were in view in the earlier chapters in any of Paul's comments, we can't be sure. They may have been a little bit, but they certainly come up in the last part of the chapter.

Now, who are these opponents? I mean, what was it they were doing, claiming, and so forth? There is evidence that his opponents were probably Jewish people in the church. In chapter 11, in verse 22, there's strong indicators of that. When he's referring to them, he says in 2 Corinthians 11, 22, are they Hebrews? So am I. Certainly that implies that they are.

Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Okay, so apparently they are Hebrew like he is, by ethnic origin. Jewish. And apparently they make an issue of it.

Paul ordinarily does not. Paul does not consider there to be any great significance between being Jew or Gentile. But the way he speaks, it makes it sound like they're making a big deal of it.

We are Hebrews, we're Israelites, we're the seed of Abraham. He says, well, are they? So am I. Big deal. That doesn't put them ahead of me.

So it sounds as if they are persons of Jewish background who are making an issue of the fact that they are people of Jewish background as a mark of their superiority. And yet he says in verse 23, are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool. I am more.

Now, apparently they are also claiming to be ministers of Christ. They're not, in other words, the Jewish leaders of the synagogue opposing the Christian church in Corinth or opposing Paul, as Paul often encountered in places like Thessalonica or some of the other places he preached. This was not, in other words, synagogue Jews or Jews who are outside the faith.

These were Jews who were in the church and even claimed to be ministers of Christ. This much, I think we can deduce from those statements. There is some reason to believe that their manner was very arrogant and domineering.

Some of the verses earlier than those we just read may suggest that. He says in verse 18 of chapter 11, seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast. Now, according to the flesh means in their natural endowments or, you know, Paul elsewhere in Philippians said that, you know, if anyone has anything to boast of in the flesh, he did more.

And he talked about being a Pharisee and being of the tribe of Benjamin and a Pharisee, you know, a keeper of the law. Apparently, these people that he's referring to were Jewish people and they boasted in the flesh. They were arrogant about being Jewish.

He says, for you put up with fools gladly since you yourselves are wise, for you put up with it. If one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face. Now, Paul is apparently describing the manner of the people he's criticizing that these people were domineering people, authoritarian.

They may not literally strike others on the face, probably not. He's probably using that figuratively, you know, sort of slaps you in the face. You just take it from them.

And he's talking figuratively in all likelihood. They're insulting, they're exalting themselves, they're domineering, they're bringing the church into bondage. Now, the word bondage there suggests very strongly legalism.

So, they're Jewish Christians who are probably legalistic and arrogant. Although he says of them in verse 23, are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool, I am more. In labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.

Which makes it sound like he's saying that he's more willing to suffer than they are. Maybe they're not willing to suffer. He goes on for several verses about that.

Now, this little bit of a sketch we can get from these references. Possibly, he may be alluding to these people in 2 Corinthians 3.1, where it says, do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need as some others epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? Now, this reference to letters of commendation. We know something about these because Paul actually sent a letter of commendation in Romans 16 for a woman named Phoebe.

And a letter of commendation essentially is, and he does it for his other co-workers elsewhere, when a person was geographically moving from one town to another and was a member of the church in one town and would be therefore joining the church of the second location. It was customary, or at least it was sometimes done, that a letter would be sent with them from the church they were leaving to the leaders of the church they were going to. There's a very obvious reason for doing that.

And that is that if a person has had a good reputation and a ministry in a town, maybe

for many years, and is well known in their hometown, but they're leaving, going to another town where no one knows them at all, they're going to be appearing in the church, no one knows who they are. It may be that these people would be of great use to the new church that they've come to, but they could not ordinarily be put into ministry very quickly or trusted very quickly if they're just a newcomer that nobody knows. They'd have to be tested and they might have to be treated as if they were a new convert and their ministry might be put on hold for a long time.

But with a letter from somebody like Paul saying, okay, Phoebe, we commend to you. She's been a real servant here. We all think highly of her here.

You know, receive her in her ministry. Then when she comes to a new church, in that case, Rome, the church of Rome would accept her already on the merits of her reputation and of the recommendation. This isn't done often enough today.

It is sometimes done. I remember when I was a child in the Baptist church and they'd always give altar calls at the end of every service. It was not very common that anyone got saved during those altar calls, but it was somewhat more common that someone would come forward and the pastor would announce, so-and-so has come and they've asked to transfer their letter from such-and-such a town.

I never knew exactly what that meant, transfer their letter. What in the world does that mean? I still am not 100% sure that I'm right, but I think now in retrospect, it's referring to the custom of, you know, they've come from a Baptist church of another town, they're coming to our town, they're joining our Baptist church, and a letter from that church is accompanying them saying, please receive them as a member. This way they don't have to go through some kind of screening or whatever, like ordinary strangers would have to before becoming a member.

So there is still some echo of that. We recognize his ministry and so forth, and that was allegedly to open doors. As a matter of fact, I never had to show those letters, and perhaps that's a reproach, but I didn't, because I just showed up in various churches across the country and in Germany, and just because I was from out of town, people let me speak and let me do things, which I'm sure didn't turn out tragic for them, I hope, but it might have.

I mean, they didn't know who I was. Anyone might show up in town saying, oh yeah, I've got this great ministry on the East Coast and I've just come here for a few days, can I speak at your Friday night meeting? I'd say, well, who knows you? If they said, well, I have a letter here from David Wilkerson, because I've come from his church, I might say, oh, well, let me see it, and if he spoke really highly of me, I might, without any further ado, let the man have the pulpit. If not, though, I might want to make a few phone calls to people he said were his pastors or whatever to find out who he is, because you don't just take a stranger and give him access to ministry in the church.

He might end up being the most wonderful minister there ever was, but you don't know that in advance, and that's what a letter of commendation does. It sort of removes all the barriers of a stranger coming to the church. If he's well reputed and well known and well commended by some other church where he's been for a long time, then the receiving church, the church at the receiving end, can receive him without any qualms.

Now, when Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3.1, do we begin to commend ourselves or do we need as some others epistles or letters of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? He's saying this sarcastically and, of course, rhetorically. He's saying, listen, we don't need to bring letters with us when we come to you and say, listen, except Paul, he's a nice guy, he's a good minister. I mean, he's their father in the faith.

Paul planted that church. They knew him. They didn't need him to present letters from someone showing what his credentials were.

That's what he's saying. But he mentions, as some others do. Now, this may just be generic, because as traveling ministers went from place to place, many of them did carry letters of commendation, no doubt.

But some scholars think there may be a hint here that the opponents of Paul had arrived in the church from out of town and carried letters of commendation, and that was their entree into the church. That was how they got in and got confidence. They carried some impressive letters of commendation.

There are some who've suggested it might even be people who carried letters from Peter. And the only reason for suggesting this, really, is that we know that Peter was very much associated with the Jerusalem church, and the Jewish believers looked up to him. He was an apostle to the circumcision.

That seems to be sort of the ethnic and cultural background of the people that he's referring to as his opponents. They may have come from Jerusalem, in other words, or from the Jewish church. And another thing is that we know in 1 Corinthians, for some strange reason, there were people in Corinth saying, I am of Cephas.

Remember, Paul said, some of you say, I am of Paul, some say, I am of Apollos, and some are saying, I am of Cephas, and some are saying, I am of Christ. It's not at all clear why there would be anyone in the church of Corinth saying, I am of Cephas. Now, Paul and maybe Barnabas, excuse me, Apollos, not Barnabas, Apollos, Paul and Apollos had both been in the church, and therefore there might be some that say, I am of Paul, some of Apollos, and some of Christ.

But why would anyone there be saying, I am of Cephas? It is suggested that perhaps there was a group of people who had come even earlier, before Paul wrote 1 Corinthians,

had arrived in Corinth, from Peter, or from the Jewish church. And that they carried maybe letters of commendation from Peter, conceivably. This is somewhat speculative, but it's trying to piece together a bit of data that's available.

And that they had received some credibility. Not enough to sway the whole church. Only some in the church when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians were saying, I am of Cephas.

And others were not. Others were, no, we're of Paul. No, I like Apollos better, or whatever.

I mean, there was some reaction perhaps to some who were trying to bring in Peter's authority, and maybe try to install some legalism and some Judaizing into the church. And it wasn't a big enough problem when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. I mean, he just saw it as a problem of division.

He didn't see their influence as significant, but it was just a matter of division. Some saying Peter, some saying Paul. That's what he addressed in 1 Corinthians.

It's possible that by the time he wrote 2 Corinthians, that very party, operating on the strength of letters of commendation, possibly from Jerusalem, were trying to bring in Judaizing tendencies into the Corinthian church. And that they are the ones that Paul is now seeing, he has to address his remarks to more strongly in 2 Corinthians. Some of that, as you can tell, is a little speculative, but some of it may not be at all inaccurate.

Now, what were they saying about Paul? I mean, on what basis could anyone speak evil of Paul? Here, the church in Corinth knew Paul. They'd seen the miracles he did. They'd been converted under his preaching.

He'd been their resident minister for 18 months. How could anyone turn this church against Paul? Well, there's a few hints of what they apparently were saying about Paul. Exactly how they were spinning this, or how they intended to, you know, how they applied it to specific cases, we don't know.

But in 2 Corinthians 10.2, Paul says, Now, he says, Who are those people? Well, they're people who say, they think about us, that we walk according to the flesh. Now, it's not at all clear what that term, according to the flesh, means. It's not clear to us.

Now, the Corinthians, of course, knew who he was talking about, knew what those people were saying, and knew exactly in what sense these people were thinking of Paul as one who walked in the flesh. The problem with us is we don't know those teachers, or what they were saying particularly. And the problem of walking after the flesh can mean a number of things.

I mean, in Romans 8.4, walking after the flesh is in contrast to walking after the Spirit. But it seems to specifically mean there that we do not trust in the flesh, but we trust in

the Spirit of God for our enablement. But after the flesh is an expression that has a lot of different meanings in Scripture.

Jesus is said to have been of the seed of David, according to the flesh. That just means his natural ancestry. And so, you'll find there is evidence here, allusion, to people criticizing Paul.

But the exact nature of the criticism is not always clear. We kind of have to deduce. They were saying, very possibly, that they were just saying that Paul is on his own trip.

He's in the flesh. He's not linked up with the Mother Church in Jerusalem. He really doesn't have their endorsement.

It's not as if the Spirit of God, which emanates from the leadership in the church in Jerusalem, has endorsed this guy. He's just out on his own trip. They might be saying something like that, although they might not be.

We're not sure. They seem to be implying that he walked in the flesh. It'd be hard, however, for them to deny the fact that he did tremendous miracles, which seem to be evidence of the Holy Spirit in his life.

I don't know what they did about that. Perhaps they argued that his miracles were fakes, and that he was more like a magician, doing these things in fleshly power, rather than the power of the Holy Spirit. Another criticism of Paul, apparently, is found in 2 Corinthians 10.10, where his critics were saying, in fact, Paul actually quotes them verbatim.

Here we can see some actual words of his opponents. For his letters, they say, are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech is contemptible. Now, Paul probably was physically a weakling.

For one thing, he took a lot of beatings. He was in fastings often, watchings oft, he lacked sleep and food many times. He was exposed to the elements a great deal.

He had something that he referred to as a thorn in his flesh. We don't know the exact nature of that, but it may have been a physical condition. He spoke to the Galatians of his condition of sickness or infirmity that was so gross, that he commends them for not being repulsed by him when he was among them, and said that if they could have done it, they would have plucked out even their own eyes to give to him.

Apparently, there was something wrong with his eyes. But Paul was not an impressive man to look at, apparently. Even the name Paul means small, and his real name was Saul, but they nicknamed him Paul.

And I don't know if he was nicknamed Paul because he was a small man or not, because

Paulus actually means small. And he may have been a frail individual, sickly, and his physical condition not improved by his lifestyle, getting beaten all the time and rotting in third world jails, and being a night and a day in the deep, and things like that. He may have had asthma and arthritis and all kinds of other problems, as well as the marks all over his body, which were scars of the beatings he'd taken.

In any case, Paul himself does not deny that he is weak and contemptible in physical presence. Now, on the other hand, the weakness of which they speak might not be his physical weakness. They might be just saying that, well, in his letters he speaks with great boldness and great authority, as if he's some big guy, but when he's around, he's much more sheepish, isn't he? He doesn't really talk that way when he's around you, he's a big coward.

He wouldn't say those things to your face that he says in his letters. In his speech, he's weak and contemptible. In his letters, oh, he thunders great anathemas and so forth.

Because he did in 1 Corinthians 16, he said, If any man does not love our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema. Paul making very strong statements in his letters, but accused of being weak and contemptible in bodily presence. Paul, of course, argues back against that, that he's strong in his letters, so that he won't have to be that way in his bodily presence.

He tries to settle matters before he arrives by letters, and then he can be more friendly when he's with them. But he has the power, he says, to be just as thunderous and just as harsh in his bodily presence, if he chooses to do so, and if it's necessary. Now, this particular criticism of him, it's hard to know exactly how much weight it would have borne.

It's almost like, I mean, it's not really a criticism of his doctrine, or of his legitimacy, although it may be, but it's hard to see how it is. It's almost just trying to point out to be inconsistent. You know, he talks real bold when he's writing.

He's really a wimp, you know, when he's here. And obviously trying to make people despise Paul, but I'm not sure how that would have any impact on his apostleship, unless they're saying, well, he's around, he doesn't act all that oppressive. Why does he make these big claims for himself in his letters, being an apostle and all that? There is another thing that is to be noted, and that is that we know that Paul didn't take pay for the ministry.

It's probable that these people did. And that made them, as they would be aware, look a little bit bad compared to him, because they took money for the ministry. And they may well have criticized Paul on this basis, by suggesting that maybe he got his money some other way, maybe under the counter.

We know from 2 Corinthians chapter 11, in verse 7, that Paul mentions that he does not take money from them. He says in great sarcasm, Did I commit sin in abasing myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge? I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. And when I was present with you and in need, I was a burden to no one.

Now, notice he says, I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you. Now, that either means that he received free will offerings, which he sarcastically refers to as robbed, like he's being accused of being maybe an embezzler or something like, are these people saying that I embezzled from other churches, and that's the only reason I didn't charge you for the ministry, because I was already set up by shifty dealings I'd done before arriving, and I already had plenty of money from robbery. He might be saying, when he says I robbed other churches, that that is what he is accused of doing.

He is speaking quite sarcastically. In fact, later on, or earlier on, I don't remember which, he basically speaks very sarcastically saying, forgive me this wrong of not charging you money. If I'm being criticized because I didn't charge money for my ministry, forgive me for wronging you in that way.

In chapter 8, verse 20 and following, Paul is talking in these chapters, chapters 8 and 9, about the collection that he is gathering to take to the churches of Judea. He's taking a collection among the Gentile churches, and he wants to deliver it to the churches in Judea, but he insists on taking much people with him to keep himself accountable, to avoid any charges that he is embezzling. He says, let me see where we want to, see verse 18 and following of chapter 8, and we have sent with him the brother who is throughout all the churches, and not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord himself, to show you a ready mind.

Avoiding this, that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which was administered by us, providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have often proved diligent in many things. Now, he talks about brethren accompanying him, so he could avoid being blamed of anything, anyone accusing him of anything with reference to this money he's carrying.

He's acting honorably, not only in the sight of the Lord, but in the sight of men. Now, in other words, I could carry this money to Jerusalem without any accompaniment, and I'd still be honorable in the sight of the Lord, because God knows I'm not an embezzler. But since men don't know that, I keep myself accountable with others with me, so that they can see that all this money gets where it's supposed to go.

Now, why does he have to say that? Is there someone accusing him, maybe, of being

one who has his hand in the cookie jar? It's hard to say. See, that's what I'm saying. You get little pieces of stuff in the epistle, and you try to put together a composite drawing of what's going on, and it's not all that easy.

But these are some of the clues that may have something to do with it, that there are some Judaizers. Perhaps they'd come from Jerusalem, and they were accusing Paul of not being a man of the Spirit, but a man walking in the flesh, and basically maligning him in these ways. And so he defends himself.

Now, that, of course, has mostly to do with the contents of chapters 10 through 13, where he is defending his apostleship and taking to task his opponents. But in the first nine chapters, we have very little of anything like that. There may be a few hints there in some of these passages of people who were opposing him currently.

But mostly in chapters 1 through 9, he's talking about someone who was opposing him earlier and is no longer doing so. And the allusions to a guy, a person who was causing a problem before, are found in this first section. And there is a question that arises as to who is this person that he's referring to? In chapter 2, 2 Corinthians 2.5, Paul says, But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent, not to be too severe.

This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. Now, there's a him here.

There's such a one here. It sounds as if he's speaking generically in verse 5. If anyone has caused grief, he doesn't really single out anyone. But in those later verses, he seems to be talking about a particular person.

That person has suffered enough. We don't want that person to be swallowed up by excessive grief. I want you to forgive that person.

So although he speaks almost sounding generic about if anyone has caused grief, it's clear from his later words that he has someone particular in mind. Somebody that the church has dealt harshly with. And that Paul is saying, Okay, that's enough.

Let him back in the church. Forgive him. Accept him back.

There is also reference to this same person, apparently, in chapter 7. But it may not be so much to the man himself, but it's to their dealing with the man. And he says in verse 8 that they had been made... Well, I need to give you some background here before these verses can be made sensible to you in this connection. He says in verse 8 that he made them sorry in his epistle that he had sent them earlier.

And he says that was good. It proved that they were loyal. They did exactly what he asked them to do.

They cleared themselves of any charge of disloyalty and so forth. In verse 11 in particular, he says, observe this very thing what diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication in all things you prove yourselves to be clear in this matter. Then he says in verse 12, Therefore, although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of him who had done the wrong.

Now there's the reference to that person again. Not for the sake of him who suffered wrong, which is thought to be possibly Paul himself. But that our care for you in the sight of God is a vague reference.

But he's obviously referring to somebody in particular who had done wrong. Somebody about whom he'd written a letter that caused sorrow to the church. But the church reacted positively to the letter and apparently did something to this guy.

And now Paul's relieved that that's probably been settled. He says in retrospect, I didn't really write it strictly for the sake of him who did the wrong or for me, the wronged party. But basically that the love that we have for each other might be demonstrated and be kept intact.

Now, what is going on here? It seems clear when Paul wrote this letter that there was a man in the Corinthian church who had been a problem. Paul had written a letter to them requiring the discipline of that man. The church had responded positively and disciplined that man.

And Paul was pleased. Now it says, OK, now you need to restore him. Now you've proven yourself to be on the right side of this conflict.

Now you can let him back in the church. There are essentially two theories about who that man is. Traditionally, the church has usually believed that that man is the same man that is in 1 Corinthians 5 exposed as living with his father's wife.

And Paul says to deliver that man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that his spirit might be saved in the day of Christ Jesus. He also says in 1 Corinthians 5, eject that man from your midst. Get him out of the church.

So there was a case of a notable sinner, a scandalous sinner in the Corinthian church when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. An incestuous man. And Paul had in fact told him in 1 Corinthians, kick him out.

Get rid of him. Discipline him. Turn him over to Satan.

Now, traditionally, that this man in 2 Corinthians whom Paul is now saying restore him is the same man whom Paul in 1 Corinthians said kick him out. And that the letter that Paul is referring to that made them sorry is the letter of 1 Corinthians. This would be the view that there were not four altogether but only three altogether letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthians.

That there was not in fact another letter between 1 and 2 Corinthians. There was certainly one before 1 Corinthians. But one theory holds that there were only two additional and that's 1 and 2 Corinthians.

The other theory is that there were a total of four and there was one between these two. Now this is the most long-standing theory held among Christians and it's still ably defended by many current scholars that Paul is referring here to the man in 1 Corinthians 5 who had been kicked out of the church because of incest but was now thoroughly repentant. But the church was not letting him back in because Paul himself had told them to kick him out and perhaps they felt that if they let him back in now Paul might wonder about their loyalty.

I mean he hadn't after all said restore him yet. And so they were waiting for word from him and this second epistle gives them that permission to let him back in. Now of course that is a theory but there's another theory that's actually seemingly more popular today among scholars.

I mean the modern theory that's popular with scholars is to be suspected for that very reason but for the very reason that it's modern and that it's acceptable by scholars. But there is some grounds for suggesting that the man that Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians is not the same man that was referred to in 1 Corinthians and he is another. Now here are the arguments for that.

When Paul speaks of this man in 2 Corinthians Paul speaks as if possibly he is one injured by the man. And it's hinted at in 2 Corinthians 2:5 where he says but if anyone has caused grief it's not that he's grieved me but all of you to some extent. Now when he says he has not grieved me he means it's not that he's primarily grieved me.

It's not that he's exclusively grieved me. It's that he's grieved us all. But the very way he says it has led some to believe that the man in question is Paul.

And Paul is trying to explain well it wasn't just me. The whole church was hurt by this deal. But he had to clarify because the church generally thought of this man as a man who had done something against Paul and Paul has to clarify that it wasn't just him.

It was everyone who was hurt by this action. And also in which we saw a moment ago in 2 Corinthians 7 in verse 12 he says therefore although I wrote to you and it is thought that him who suffered wrong is a reference to Paul. Now these two statements have led

many to believe that the man in question had done something more directly offensive to Paul personally than the man who was simply living with his father's wife.

Now the man who lived with his father's wife was doing a horrible sin but it was not a sin directed with any hostility necessarily toward Paul. It was probably just a matter of a sin of lust rather than a sin of something that Paul would be seen as the principal victim of this man's actions. And for this reason a lot of scholars they believe that the man in question was perhaps a man who had risen up in the church trying to oppose Paul.

Now I don't believe he would be one of these ones that Paul's rebuking in the later parts of 2 Corinthians in chapters 10 through 13 because he's very harsh with them but he's actually being very conciliatory toward this man. Now the people of Corinth had a recurring problem of people rising up questioning Paul, challenging Paul. We know of course from the fact that 1 Corinthians mentions some were saying we're of Paul others I'm of Cephas or I'm of Apollos that the very fact that some were saying I'm of Paul was not something Paul encouraged.

They must have been doing that in response to others who were defecting from Paul. The whole church had been as it were of Paul. We're of Apollos which was another way of saying we're not following Paul's leadership we're following the leadership of these men.

And so in reaction apparently some of the church said we're still of Paul and others said hey let's forget this Paul, Cephas, Apollos we're just of Christ. Those four sects or four opinions. But you can see even in 1 Corinthians there were some there who may have been trying to question whether Paul's authority was correct.

Now if the current theory of the scholars is correct the man that Paul is rebuking in 2 Corinthians was a man who rose up in the church probably after Paul had left and after Paul had written 1 Corinthians and after that epistle had been sent because he doesn't mention that man in 1 Corinthians. So sometime in the interim between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians a man may have risen up in the church nowhere near as troublesome as the people that Paul is rebuking in the end of this epistle but troublesome enough that he was accusing Paul or trying to undermine Paul in some way and that Paul when he heard of it may have written a letter a harsh letter to the church saying how come you're putting up with this guy kick him out and they did. And then the guy came around and was sorrowful for that and really wished he hadn't done it and kind of saw the light well see the very fact that Paul even speaks of himself as the one doing the forgiving suggests that he was perhaps the injured party.

Well I can't find all the verses that are relevant to this but oh it's in chapter 2 that's right I'm trying to remember I get chapter 2 and 7 mixed up because they deal with the same subject matter yeah in chapter 2 when Paul tells them to forgive he says in verse 10 now whom you forgive anything I also forgive for if indeed I have forgiven anything I have forgiven it I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ now again if

Paul says I forgive him it sounds as if Paul may have been the injured party and so many have felt from these little bits of evidence that the man in question was more of a political problem in the church not a moral problem not someone who was sleeping with his father's wife had to be kicked out for that but somebody who rose up opposing Paul's authority in the church they had to be kicked out for that Tertullian actually very early church father was aware of the view that it was the same man as mentioned in 1 Corinthians that it was the incestuous man that Paul is now restoring here but Tertullian did not approve that view he was one of the very rigorous party who believed that once a person committed sexual sin after baptism they should never be forgiven there were a lot of rigorous who believed that in the early church and that after baptism you couldn't be forgiven if you committed a serious sin like incest and so Tertullian just couldn't stand the thought that Paul would restore such a man if it was that man and just say well receive him back now and he thought that would be too lightly the man's sinfulness but I'm not sure that Tertullian and the leaders of the church at that time who thought that way really had the heart of God sexual sin is a terrible thing but so is rising up in opposition against the apostle a very evil thing sexual sin is evil but it's not unforgivable and if this is in fact a reference back to the man in 1 Corinthians 5 who is cohabiting with his father's wife as far as I'm concerned all these verses could still apply I mean there's nothing in what we've just said that rules out entirely that Paul is talking about that man in 1 Corinthians but another thing that is argued about this and against it being that man is that it's very clear that this man was excommunicated from the church in Corinth because of a letter Paul sent now the man in 1 Corinthians 5 was excommunicated because of the letter Paul sent and that letter is 1 Corinthians this man also had been kicked out because of a letter Paul had sent but many feel like the letter that Paul sent that he refers to here is not 1 Corinthians the main reason being that Paul refers to this letter as a sorrowful epistle or an epistle that is very painful for him to write as if he wrote it with tears and with great churning of heart this of course comes out in chapter 7 and in chapter 2 those two chapters seem to deal with this the most but he specifically says in chapter 7 verse 8 even if I made you sorry with my letter I do not regret it he says though I did regret it in other words after I sent the letter I had some questions whether that was wise for me to take this approach but now I don't regret it because I see it worked that's what he says there and also chapter 2 verse 4 he says for out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears that's chapter 2 verse 4 so you can see he's referring to a letter he wrote to them that he wrote to them in much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears and which made them sorrowful when they received it and it was so extreme in this respect that Paul even regretted having sent it initially but when he saw that it was effective he put away his regrets and was glad that he had sent it now it is suggested that the first letter to the Corinthians doesn't fit that description it is said that 1 Corinthians doesn't have any evidence that Paul is writing in tears now there are some problems in the church Corinthian addresses serious ones in the courts of law there are problems with the gifts of the spirit being not exercised properly in the church there was problems with the

communion table there were some problems with the women in their head covering practice there were problems in the church when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and it is argued even though he dealt with these problems he does it without a great deal of emotion you don't read 1 Corinthians and feel like you're reading a tear stained document and therefore they say well he must be referring to a different letter than 1 Corinthians and that would be one that was sent after 1 Corinthians but before 2 Corinthians and that would be of course the one they call Corinthians C so on this view even though 1 Corinthians was a letter of rebuke and did result in the excommunication of a certain man from the church it is argued there was another letter that resulted in the excommunication of a different man for a different issue and this we know only by illusion not by any hard evidence so I'm going to leave the matter undecided it's really hard to say we do know for sure that when Paul wrote 2 Corinthians he had written an earlier sorrowful epistle that was painful for the church and resulted in the kicking out or the excommunication of a certain individual who was at fault for something whether that letter was 1 Corinthians and that man was the man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5 or that letter was another one now lost and the man in question a different man accused of different charges we will perhaps never know for sure but these are the kinds of things scholars love to talk about now you might say well we could have done without all of that I'd rather just get into the text well we will do that and without considering some of these possibilities these illusions will simply mean nothing to us or they may mean something we may think they mean something we will not have really fully considered it let me survey for you before we get into chapter 1 Paul's relations with the church of Corinth from beginning to end that we know of it was on his second missionary journey that he established that church and he stayed with Priscilla and Aquila as a tent maker in Corinth and for 18 months ministered there after which he left and went to Ephesus we know that partly from Acts because in Acts chapter 18 we read of his stay in Corinth and we read of his departure and going to Ephesus and he took Priscilla and Aquila with him actually when he went to Ephesus we also know that when he from Ephesus wrote back to Corinth in 1st Corinthians he mentioned something about his travel plans in the future if you look at 1st Corinthians 16 he says in verse 5 now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia for I am going to pass through Macedonia but it may be that I will remain or even spend the winter with you that you may send me on my journey wherever I go for I do not wish to see you now on my way but I hope to stay a while with you if the Lord permits but I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost ok now he says I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost apparently he was in Ephesus at that time he was planning a trip to Macedonia as he makes clear in verse 5 he intended not to visit them on his way to Macedonia he was eager to get to Macedonia and he wanted to spend a more substantial time with them than he would be able to do before going to Macedonia so he intended to go to Macedonia first and then visit them after he was done in Macedonia and possibly spend the winter with them now this he wrote at a time when things were not too bad with the church in Corinth he was not going to come immediately to them he was going to wait in Ephesus until Pentecost Corinth and stay

there through the winter possibly now his plans changed and apparently something happened that made him decide that he better come to Corinth on his way to Macedonia rather than after being in Macedonia in other words he saw a reason to hastily go back to Corinth he alludes to this in 2nd Corinthians 1.15 he said and in this confidence I intended to come to you before that you might have a second benefit to pass by way of you to Macedonia to come in again from Macedonia to you and be helped by you on my way to Judea now notice this plan he is describing is a different one than he described at the end of 1st Corinthians at the end of 1st Corinthians he said I'm going to go to Macedonia first then I'll come to you now he says I actually had a plan to pass through you to Macedonia and then back to you again after Macedonia so after he wrote 1st Corinthians something caused him to change his plan and decide well I'm going to visit them twice not once I'm going to visit them not only when I leave Macedonia I'm going to also visit them before that on my way to Macedonia now why is that? why did he do that? he doesn't say except that he thought it would give him a second benefit to have two ministry visits instead of one actually it was this very change of plans on his part there were other changes after that it has been suggested that Paul made a hasty visit to Corinth which he had not earlier planned to make because of the rise of opposition in Corinth that is he wrote 1st Corinthians saying well I'll be going through Macedonia and I'll be staying here in Ephesus for a while then going through Macedonia then I'll make it to you sometime before winter and stay through the winter with you very casual no emergency no rush but at some point he changed his plans he said no I better go there on my way to Macedonia as well as coming out he planned in earlier reason now this might have just been because he found himself in possession of a little more time and wanted to spend more time with them because he enjoyed their company he made this change in plans because he had heard of a problem in the church that needed his direct attention he had left Timothy in the church in 1st Corinthians but Timothy was a meek and somewhat intimidated person he actually tells the Corinthians in 1st Corinthians not to intimidate Timothy he says in 1st Corinthians 16.10 now if Timothy comes to see if Timothy comes see that he may be with you without fear for he does the work of the Lord as also I do now the reason I say that I think he was a bit intimidated is Paul says may he be with you without fear therefore let no one despise him later on Paul writes to Timothy and says God has not given us a spirit of fear and let no one despise you and so Timothy may have been a person inclined to be because of his youthfulness intimidated by the church where there were probably many people his senior and he might have been a very meek individual not willing to press his authority and so forth even when Paul gave him authority so Paul had to encourage first of all Timothy not to operate in a spirit of fear and not to let people despise you he also had to write to the church and say now don't make him afraid and don't despise him but apparently Timothy's leadership was not so strong as to settle whatever problem that was an embarrassment to Paul it was a trip that caused him great sorrow it is believed because he says in 2nd Corinthians 2 1 I determined this within myself that I would not come again to you in sorrow now putting this together here's what I'd like to summarize Paul's first plan was to pass

through Macedonia then visit Corinth he changed his plans because of some emergency he announced his plan that he would go to them on his way to Macedonia and again coming out of Macedonia well what transpired in the meantime is he did make that trip to Corinth on his way to Macedonia but it was a great sorrow to him something embarrassing happened to him it was a disaster and so he went on to Macedonia and decided not to revisit Corinth on his way back from Macedonia for which he got criticized because he had told them that he was going to Macedonia but he didn't why? well chapter 2 verse 1 says because he determined he didn't want to come in that sorrowful spirit again it was a disaster and he didn't want to have a repeat of that disaster and in fact much of what he says in chapter 1 and 2 of 2nd Corinthians is giving his explanation of why he didn't come back as announced apparently they were accusing him of being unreliable some people think there's a hint of it in chapter 12 in verse 21 this may or may not be given a hint of it but some feel like this is an allusion to how badly things went for him when he visited on that time it says unless when I come again my God will humble me among you and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of this uncleanness fornication licentiousness which they have practiced some feel that Paul is referring back to the fact that when he did visit them it was humiliating there were unrepentant people in the church and he couldn't bring Timothy couldn't do it and even Paul couldn't do it couldn't bring them to repentance and so he left Macedonia and whereas he had planned to come back to the church in Corinth on his way back from Macedonia he decided against it at least at that time instead he sent a letter which was the sorrowful letter and he was in Macedonia he sent a letter back rather than visiting himself he sent a letter instead of his personal visit he sent it by Titus Titus carried the letter for him and he wasn't sure what would happen because his own personal visit had been such a disaster he had no confidence that this letter he sent was going to get the results according to the theory of the scholars it was on that sorrowful visit that this man when Paul left he sent back this sorrowful anguished letter to the church saying how could you allow that to happen and then they were smitten in their conscience and they disciplined the man kicked him out and now Paul's writing this letter saying you did the right thing you did well I was glad to see you're still on my side here that is considered to be the scenario when Paul wrote 2 Corinthians some things had transpired after he'd written 1 Corinthians Paul had made a quick visit probably to try to shut down some rebellion in the church of which there may have been a particular guy and he may not have been a Judaizer the Judaizers are the ones Paul lambasted in the end of 2 Corinthians he's being nice to this guy this guy could very well have been more of an antinomian more of a Gnostic type a guy who was advocating libertarianism in the sense not in the sense that we think of the political part of libertarianism but in the sense that religious libertarianism where it's okay to go eat in the idol temple it's okay to commit fornication with the temple prostitutes we're saved by grace and all that and the reason I say that this may have been the man's approach is that Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12-21 that when he comes back he doesn't want it to be like the previous time he doesn't want God to have to have sinned before and have not repented of uncleanness fornication,

licentiousness which they practiced so there are some people they're unrepentant of their sexual practices which are sinful and that he takes to be something he doesn't want to repeat performance of he doesn't want to come back and have to mourn that so he sent a letter to them to get that straightened out and Titus carried the letter and Paul had gone to Troas with instructions to Titus to meet him there but Titus didn't show up and Paul got all concerned about what had happened to Titus this is when Titus had taken the letter to Corinth but Paul had not yet heard the outcome there is reference to this in 2 Corinthians 7-5 I think right there he says, for indeed when we came to Macedonia our flesh had no rest we were troubled on every side outside were conflicts inside were fears nevertheless God who comforts the downcast comforted us by the coming of Titus so I guess it was earlier he mentioned that he went to Troas because he waited for Titus Titus didn't come and so he went on ahead to Troas I guess it must have been I can't remember where everything is in here we'll worry about it another time I think it might be chapter 4 whatever Paul actually went on to Troas Titus didn't show up there so Paul went back to Macedonia and Titus did come and join him there and when Titus joined him there in Macedonia it says in verse 7 chapter 7 verse 7 and not only by his coming but also by the consolation which he was comforted in you when he told us of your earnest desire your mourning, your zeal for me so that I might rejoice even more so when Titus rejoined Paul in Macedonia it was with news that the letter that had been carried had gotten a good result and so Paul was comforted not only by meeting Titus but by the good news that he brought and this is the background of the epistle I imagine it sounds very complex to you it is somewhat complex but it can be simplified fairly well and I've already done that I hope I've made the whole chronology clear that Paul heard of problems he made a quick visit to Corinth to try to fix it he was opposed there he was embarrassed, he was humiliated he left, worried about the state of the church sent a letter back by Titus and without waiting to hear news of it he traveled on and told Titus to meet him later on he went to Troas Titus didn't meet him there Paul got worried, he was in anguish he was worried about Titus, he had no rest he went back to Macedonia he was there but finally his anguish and his concerns were laid to rest by the reappearance of Titus and by the good news that Titus brought that the church was doing well so Paul wrote this letter to congratulate them and to rejoice with them that they were now on the right side of this controversy again that they had done what Paul said they had kicked this guy out of the church but apparently news had come to Paul that the man had also repented after being kicked out of the church apparently being kicked out of the church was a severe enough punishment that it brought him to his senses and he repented and he was sorry for what he did but the church was still not fully accepting him back and for good reason I mean you would imagine they were embarrassed that they had not shown more loyalty to Paul before and so finally when they were confronted about it they went ahead and did the right thing and kicked him out now they weren't sure whether they should accept him back in even if the guy seemed repentant would it look to Paul that accepting his former opponent back in was themselves backsliding a little bit back away from Paul and toward his opponent so they were kind of keeping this

guy at arm's length even though he apparently had endured some sorrow and some repentance anyway so Paul wrote this letter in part to express his rejoicing but also in part to give instructions about restoring the man who had now repented now all of that scenario may sound extremely irrelevant to anything in our lives today I mean if all that happened if this epistle was occasioned by these particular circumstances these unique historical events unrepeatably not happening today Paul's not here there's no one here doing those things we haven't kicked the guy out I mean what is the use of reading this epistle today well much every way there's very much in the epistle of tremendous spiritual truth it's all intermixed with Paul's telling parts of the story and laying his heart on his sleeve and laying out his feelings and so forth there's a lot of that but it's all mixed with some tremendous tremendous theological teaching that is interspersed simply because Paul can't talk for very long without including a lot of theology he's always thinking about truth you know and always talking about it and so as I said at the beginning of this lecture there are some difficulties with this epistle I don't think I'm the only one who finds it so I haven't heard other teachers complain of it like I have but I like this epistle a great deal and some of my very favorite passages are in this epistle and when I'm teaching on certain subjects like suffering for example I probably quote more from this epistle than any other individual epistle from Paul it's got tremendous stuff in it and as I say at the beginning there are some phrases there are some allusions to things that we just don't know for sure why he used that phrase and whether our understanding of it is precisely correct and we don't know also for sure all the background but we've tried to reconstruct it for you here so that when we come to the passages where it's helpful to know the background we at least have some kind of a scenario to work from and we're going to stop there rather than going into the epistle we have only about five minutes or something and there's no sense getting that far into it and stopping we'll just close up the introduction and get into chapter one when we come back after a break