THE STRUCTURE OF
2 CORINTHIANS 1-7

CRAIG BLOMBERG
Denver Seminary, Denver, CO 80210

Paul's epistles are generally among the clearest of the NT writings
to outline. After struggling to identify the principles which guided the
gospel writers to arrange parallel pericopae in seemingly conflicting
sequences, or after puzzling over the complex interplay of theology
and ethics in Hebrews and most of the general epistles, the expositor
breathes a sigh of relief when he comes to the letters of Paul. Romans
divides neatly in two after chap. 11, with the previous chapters in turn
subdividing relatively unambiguously according to the stages of God's
plan of redemption for the world. First Corinthians reads like a
checklist of controversial issues in Corinth, with chaps. 1-6 respond-
ing in order to items raised by the messengers from Chloe's household
and chaps. 7-16 replying to questions in a written letter from the
Corinthian church to Paul. Even the shorter epistles usually acknowl-
edged as Pauline, with Philippians as a possible exception, generally
fall into two or three main sections with discernible progressions of
thought within each of these.[1]

Second Corinthians, therefore, stands out all the more strikingly
with its unparalleled lack of apparent structure and unity. The two
sections which most commentators agree hang together as unified
wholes, chaps. 10-13 and 2:14-7:4, follow so abruptly from the pre-
ceding material that they have regularly been regarded as entirely

---

[1] See esp. U. Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Romer* (EKKNT 6/1-3; Zurich: Benziger;
Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1978-82); C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First
Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Black, 1968); H.-D. Betz, *Galatians* (Philadelphia:
Fortress, 1979); B. Rigaux, *Les epftres aux Thessaloniciens* (Paris: Gabalda; Gembloux:
Duculot, 1956).

separate letters interpolated into their present contexts.[2] A third much shorter section, 6:14-7:1, seems intrusive even for many supporters of the unity of the rest of chaps. 1-9.[3] On any scheme Paul seems preoccupied more with discussing his travel plans, his apostolic authority, and the Corinthians' attitude toward him than with conveying any lofty theological truths.

The purpose of this paper is not to review all the various theories which have arisen to account for these phenomena, nor even to address the problems of the letter's structure beyond those of the first seven chapters. Rather it is to suggest what I believe is a new approach to the question of the outline of 1:12-7:16 and to point out the implications of such an outline for certain issues of interpretation and integrity. I will take for granted as largely uncontroversial the identification of the first eleven verses of the epistle as introductory salutation and thanksgiving, and I will follow the traditional consensus which sees chaps. 8 and 9 as a relatively discrete section on the collection for the saints in Jerusalem, despite some recent attempts to link earlier material more closely with it.[4] The structure which I will propose for the intervening six-and-one-half chapters depends on an understanding of this section as an extended chiasmus.

I. *Criteria for Detecting Extended Chiasmus*

Not too many years ago chiastic or inverted parallelism was scarcely discussed in examinations of the outline of major sections of Scripture, being viewed simply as a poetic device for short Hebrew couplets. Today, parts of almost every book in Scripture have been outlined chiastically, with many of the proposals straining all bounds

[2] For detailed, recent surveys of the various proposals, see V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians* (AB 32A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984) 29-54; R. P. Martin, *2 Corinthian* (Waco, TX; Word, 1986) xxxviii-Iii.

[3] E.g., W. G. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975) 291-92; L. T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 292; C. Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 37-40.

[4] Furnish (*II Corinthians*, 392) takes 7:4-16 as an introduction to chaps. 8-9 and as part of a larger section of appeals from 5:20-9:15. C. K. Barrett (*A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* [London: Black, 1973J 51) makes 7:5-9:15 a major division entitled "Paul's plans for Corinth, and their working out in the future." On the other hand, H.-D. Betz (*2 Corinthians 8 and 9*. [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985J) epitomizes an important opposing tradition which finds the disjuncture between chaps. 7-8 so great as to assume that chap. 8 begins a new letter. Betz's case remains unproved, but it at least demonstrates the major caesura in Paul's outline at this point."

of credulity. In his *II Chiasmo nella Bibbia*, A. di Marco has compiled a voluminous catalog of likely and unlikely hypotheses from modern scholarship through the mid-seventies.[5] J. Welch's anthology, *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, also offers a number of improbable proposals but nevertheless succeeds in demonstrating the widespread use of chiasmus in both prose and poetry, both *Hoch-* and *Kleinliteratur*, throughout the ancient Near East.[6] Two observations emerge from di Marco's and Welch's works. First, chiasmus was used far more widely in the ancient world than it is today, so that it likely underlies numerous portions of Scripture where it has not usually been perceived. Second, because chiastic outlines have become so fashionable among biblical scholars, any new hypotheses should be subjected to a fairly rigid set of criteria before being accepted. Yet I know of no study which has mandated detailed criteria which hypotheses of extended chiasmus must meet in order to be credible.[7] I propose the following nine criteria, therefore, as sufficiently restrictive to prevent one from imagining chiasmus where it was never intended:

(1) There must be a problem in perceiving the structure of the text in question, which more conventional outlines fail to resolve. This criterion singlehandedly casts serious doubts over many recent proposals.[8] If a more straightforward structure can adequately account for the textual data, recourse to less obvious arrangements of the material would seem, at the very least, to risk obscuring what was already clear.

(2) There must be clear examples of parallelism between the two "halves" of the hypothesized chiasmus, to which commentators call attention even when they propose quite different outlines for the text overall. In other words, the chiasmus must be based on hard data in

---

[5] Torino: Marietti, 1980. Cf. idem, "Der Chiasmus in der Bibel," *Linguistica Biblica* 36 (1975) 21-97; 37 (1976) 37-85; 44 (1979) 3-70.

[6] Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981. Cf. also K. E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 44-75; A. Stock, "Chiastic Awareness and Education in Antiquity," *BTB* 14 (1984) 23-27.

[7] D. Clark ("Criteria for Identifying Chiasm," *Linguistica Biblica* 35 [1975] 63-72) promises more than he delivers, suggesting merely that one look for a combination of parallels in form, content and language, and spends most of his time discussing only one example, that of J. Dewey on Mark 2:1-3:6.

[8] E.g., P. M. Scott, "Chiastic. Structure: A Key to the Interpretation of Mark's Gospel,"*BTB* 15 (1985) 17-26; K. E. Bailey, "The Structure of 1 Corinthians and Paul's Theological Method with Special Reference to 4:17," *NovT* 25 (1983) 152-81; M. Girard, "La composition structurelle des sept signes dans Ie quatrieme evangile," *SR* 9 (1980) 315-24. More straightforward outlines of Mark, 1 Corinthians, and John adequately account for the textual data.

the text which most readers note irrespective of their overall synthesis. Otherwise it is too simple to see what one wants to see and to impose on the text an alien structural grid.[9]

(3) Verbal (or grammatical) parallelism as well as conceptual (or structural) parallelism should characterize most if not all of the corresponding pairs of subdivisions. The repetitive nature of much biblical writing makes it very easy for general themes to recur in a variety of patterns.[10]

(4) The verbal parallelism should involve central or dominant imagery or terminology, not peripheral or trivial language. Ancient writers often employed key terms as catchwords to link passages together, although the material they considered central does not always match modern preconceptions of what is important.[11]

(5) Both verbal and conceptual parallelism should involve words and ideas not regularly found elsewhere within the proposed chiasmus. Most unpersuasive proposals fail to meet this criterion; while the pairings suggested may be plausible, a little ingenuity can demonstrate equally close parallelism between numerous other pairs of passages which do not support a chiastic whole.[12]

(6) Multiple sets of correspondences between passages opposite each other in the chiasmus as well as multiple members of the chiasmus itself are desirable. A simple ABA' or ABB' A' pattern is so common to so many different forms of rhetoric that it usually yields few startlingly profound insights.[13] Three or four members repeated in inverse sequence may be more significant. Five or more elements

---

[9] This would seem to be a major problem for K. A. Strand, "The Eight Basic Visions in the Book of Revelation," *AUSS* 25 (1987) 107-21. A more natural parallelism would pair the seven seals and seven bowls with the seven trumpets in the middle. Cf. also the very vague parallels suggested by K. Grobel, "Chiastic Retribution-Formula in Romans 2," Zeit und Geschichte (FS. R. Bultmann; Tubingen: E. Dinkler, 1964) 255-61.

[10] Thus weakening the hypotheses, e.g., of E. S. Fiorenza, "Composition and Structure of the Book of Revelation," *CBQ* 39 (1977) 344-66; and S. J. Kidder, "'This Generation in Matthew 24:34," *AUSS* 21 (1983) 203-9.

[11] The most comprehensive study on catchwords remains M. Jousse, *Le style oral rhythmique et mnemotechnique* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1925, 1981). Much NT writing with these kinds of links resembles various kinds of Jewish midrash; on which see R. T. France and D. Wenham, eds., *Gospel Perspectives III: Studies in Midrash and Historiography* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983).

[12] I have emphasized this point in my "Midrash, Chiasmus, and the Outline of Luke's Central Section," in ibid., 217-61. See, e.g., the proposals of M. D. Goulder, "The Chiastic Structure of the Lucan Journey," *TU* 87 (1964) 195-202; C. H. Talbert, *Literary Patterns, Theological Themes and the Genre of Luke-Acts* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1974) 58-65; Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 79-85.

[13] But see below n. 51.

paired in sequence usually resist explanations which invoke subconscious or accidental processes.[14]

(7) The outline should divide the text at natural breaks which would be agreed upon even by those proposing very different structures to account for the whole. If a proposed chiasmus frequently violates the natural "paragraphing" of the text which would otherwise emerge, then the proposal becomes less probable.[15]

(8) The center of the chiasmus, which forms its climax, should be a passage worthy of that position in light of its theological or ethical significance. If its theme were in some way repeated in the first and last passages of the text, as is typical in chiasmus,[16] the proposal would become that much more plausible.

(9) Finally, ruptures in the outline should be avoided if at all possible. Having to argue that one or more of the members of the reverse part of the structure have been shifted from their corresponding locations in the forward sequence substantially weakens the hypothesis; in postulating chiasmus, exceptions disprove the rule![17]

These nine criteria are seldom fulfilled *in toto* even by well-established chiastic structures, so it would seem these controls might actually be too rigid. But granted that some exceptions should be permitted, the more of these criteria which a given hypothesis fails to meet, the more sceptical a reception it deserves. Conversely, a hypothesis which fulfills most or all of the nine stands a strong chance of reflecting the actual structure of the text in question. Considering a small spectrum of recent proposals not already mentioned in the notes above, and without defending each application in detail, I would thus

---

[14] For one attempt to give precise statistical quantifIcation to judgments of this type, see Y. T. Radday, "Chiasmus in Hebrew Biblical Narrative," in Welch, *Chiasmus*, 50-117, esp. the appendix, 116-17.

[15] Here is a major problem with P. F. Ellis, *The Genius of John* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1984). John 4:39-45 is not really detachable from 4:4-38 (or else vv 39-42 should go with 4-38 and 43-45 with 46-52). Cf. also the unusual outline of R. Morgenthaler, *Die lukanische Geschichtsschreibung als Zeugnis* (Zurich: Zwingli, 1948) 1:156-57.

[16] On interpreting chiasmus in general, see the pioneering work of N. W. Lund, *Chiasmus in the New Testament* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1942). More recently, but much more briefly, cf. J. Breck, "Biblical Chiasmus: Exploring Structure for Meaning," *BTB* 17 (1978) 70-74.

[17] Thus calling into question, e.g., D. R. Miesner, "The Missionary Journeys Narrative: Patterns and Implications," *Perspectives on Luke-Acts* (ed. C. H. Talbert; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978) 199-214; C. H. Talbert, "Artistry and Theology: An Analysis of the Architecture of Jn 1, 19-5,47" *CBQ* 32 (1970) 341-66. Talbert correctly recognizes that not all structures are perfect in form, but he does not distinguish between ruptures which do not call into question an overall outline and those which do. More nuanced is H. V. D. Parunek, "Oral Typesetting: Some Uses of Biblical Structure," *Bib* 62 (1981) 168.

assess A. Culpepper's view of John 1:1-18 as highly likely;[18] P. Davids' approach to the Epistle of James as quite plausible even though more complex than a simple inversion;[19] K. Wolfe's analysis of Luke-Acts as attractive, though fairly general;[20] H. J. B. Combrink's outline of Matthew as at least slightly more convincing than current alternatives;[21] my own work on Luke's central section as at least no worse than the alternatives;[22] A. Vanhoye's treatment of Hebrews as not terribly helpful;[23] D. Deeks on the Fourth Gospel as much too vague and subtle;[24] and J. Bligh on Galatians as painfully forced and hopelessly elaborate.[25] These examples could be multiplied, with the less con-vincing ones outweighing the more convincing, but they provide a sufficient sample for comparison with the proposal for 2 Corinthians 1- 7 put forward here.

II. *The Outline of 2 Cor 1:12-7:16*

The outline to be submitted to these nine criteria for evaluation is as follows:

A
  1:12-22--the Corinthians can
    rightfully boast in Paul

A'
  7:13b-16--Paul can rightfully boast
    in the Corinthians

B
  1 :23- 2: 11--grief and comfort over
    the painful letter; hope for
    forgiving the offender

B'
  7 :8-13a--grief and comfort over
    the painful letter; joy after
    forgiving the offender

[18] R. A. Culpepper, "The Pivot of John's Prologue," *NTS* 27 (1980-81) 1-31.

[19] P.H. Davids, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 22-29. The principal criterion not met is (8).

[20] K. R. Wolfe, "The Chiastic Structure of Luke-Acts and Some Implications for Worship," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 22 (1980) 60-71. Criteria (3) and (6) would seem least satisfactorily met.

[21] H.. J. B. Combrink, "The Structure of the Gospel of Matthew as Narrative," *Tyndale Bulletin* 34 (1983) 61-00. Criteria (3), (4), and (5) are all in doubt, but all the rest are met very nicely.

[22] Blomberg, "Midrash." All nine criteria are met but the biggest problems revolve around the source-critical hypotheses required.

[23] A. Vanhoye, *La structure litteraire de fepitre aux Hebreux* (Paris: Desclee, 1963). Vanhoye's structure is not entirely chiastic, based on subtle connections between proposed "catchwords," and overly complex.

[24] D. Deeks, "The Structure of the Fourth Gospel," *NTS* 15 (1968) 107-29. Few of the proposed correspondences are close, and the resulting outline is an unlikely hybrid of synonymous and antithetical parallels.

[25] J. Bligh, *Galatians in Greek* (Detroit: University of Detroit Press, 1966). Bligh postulates as many as five overlapping levels of concentricity, with the vast majority of his correspondences being extremely vague.

C
  2:12-13--looking for Titus in
     Macedonia

C'
  7:5-7--finding Titus in Macedonia

D
  2:14-4:6--a series of contrasts--
     belief vs. unbelief, centered on
     Christians as the letters of the
     living God, in glory being
     transformed into his image

     a 2:14-16a--death vs.life
     b 2:16b-3:3--false vs true
        approaches to ministry
     c 3:4-18--old covenant vs. new
     b' 4:1-2--false vs. true'approaches
        to ministry
     a' 4:3-6--darkness vs. light

D'
  6:11-7:4--a series of
     contrasts-belief vs. unbelief,
     centered on Christians as the
     temple of the living God, in light
     being transformed into his
     holiness

     a 6:11-13--widen your hearts
     b 6:14-7:1--separate yourselves
        from uncleanness
     a' 7:2-4--open your hearts

E
  4:7-5:10--surviving and triumphing
     despite every hardship (see esp.
     vv.8-10)

E'
  6:1-10-surviving and triumphing
     despite every hardship (see esp.
     vv.8b-10)

F
  5:11-21-the theological climax:
  the ministry of reconciliation

It would seem that this outline satisfies all nine criteria remarkably
well.

    (1) The difficulty in following Paul's train of thought and the in-
adequacy of previous outlines is readily admitted by most commen-
tators. Toward the beginning of the century, for example, A. Plummer
wrote,

> With regard to the letter itself it is better to talk of 'contents' rather than
> 'plan.' Beyond the three clearly marked divisions (i.-vii.; viii., ix.; x.-xiii.)
> there is not much evidence of plan. In these main divisions the Apostle
> seems to have dictated what he had to say just as his thoughts and
> feelings moved him, without much consideration of arrangement or
> logical sequence.[26]

Due to the occasional nature of the epistles, there is nothing inherently
implausible in this, except that Paul regularly seems rather more
organized. A digression like Phil 3:2-4:7 might provide a partial

---

[26] A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of I
St. Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T, & T, Clark, 1915) xx.

parallel for a section such as 2 Cor 6:14-7:1[27] but hardly for one as substantial as 2:14-7:4. An outline which avoids such digressions, if a reasonable one can be found, would seem to be preferable. Yet a survey of current analyses which attempt to do more than simply label the paragraphs in sequence without any assessment of coordination and subordination[28] regularly reveals the recourse to postulating major and minor digressions of various sorts. In addition to 2: 14- 7:4 and 6:14- 7:1,[29] C. K. Barrett is forced to call 5:1-10 on the resurrection of the believer "a digression illustrating further the relative unimportance of the earthenware container,"[30] V. Furnish admits that he views 1:18-22 on Paul's integrity in his promises "a somewhat ponderous excursus,"[31] and W. Schmithals finds a sufficient break after 6:2 to split 2:14- 7:4 into two separate letters at that point.[32] Surely one ought to welcome proposals that would improve on these. R. Martin is on the right track when he labels 2:14-7:4 "the main theme" of the letter rather than a digression, but the shifts from one section to the next remain as abrupt as ever.[33]

(2) As the outline indicates, there is no problem demonstrating conceptual parallelism between the forward and reverse sequences of the chiasmus. The objects of boasting vary from A to A', but the purpose of Paul's expressions of confidence remains the same in each case: to "state the view of the writer that he hopes his readers now have or will gain from the commendation."[34] B and B' obviously

---

[27] Philippians has also given rise to theories of multiple letter fragments, but see B. Mengel, *Studien zum Philipperbrief* (WUNT 2/8; Tubingen: Mohr, 1982). Cf. W. J. Dalton, "The Integrity of Philippians," *Bib* 60 (1979) 97-102; D. E. Garland, "The Composition and Unity of Philippians," *NovT* 27 (1985) 141-73; D. F. Watson, "A Rhetorical Analysis of Philippians and Its Implications for the Unity Question," *NovT* 30 (1988) 57-88.

[28] As e.g., in P. E. Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961); J. Hering, *La seconde epitre de Saint Paul aux Corinthiens* (CNT 8; Neuchatel: Delachaux et Niestle, 1958); H. Lietzmann, *An die Korinther 1/11* (HNT 9; Tiibingen: 1969); R. H. Strachan, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935); J.-F. Collange, *Enigmes de la deuxieme epitre de Paul aux Corinthiens* (SNTS 18; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

[29] Even those who argue for the unity of the epistle regularly refer to these sections as digressions. See e.g., M. J. Harris, "2 Corinthians," (EBC 10; ed. F. E. Gaebelein; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 317; R. V. G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Tyndale, 1958) 29-30; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London: Oliphants, 1971) 214.

[30] Barrett, *Second Corinthians*, 51.

[31] Furnish, *II Corinthians,* 141. N. Hyldahf ("Die literarische Einheit des 2 Korintherbriefes," *ZNW* 64 [1973] 296) includes v. 17 as part of the digression.

[32] W. Schmithals, "Die Korintherbriefe als Briefsammlung," *ZNW* 64 (1973) 288.

[33] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, xxxvii.

[34] S. N. Olson, "Epistolary Uses of Expressions of Self-Confidence," *JBL* 103 (1984) 596. Cf. idem, "Pauline Expressions of Confidence in His Addressees," *CBQ* 47 (1985) 282-95.

belong together in all attempts to understand the offending party at Corinth, as a glance at most any introduction to 2 Corinthians reveals. The similarity between 2:12-13 and 7:5-7 is the very reason why the intervening text has been labeled an interpolation or a digression.[35] The catalogs of Christian hardships which are ultimately overcome in 4:7-12 and 6:3-10 are regularly compared as among the most poignant in all of Scripture.[36]

The least obvious pair matches 2:14-4:6 with 6:11-7:4. Still, both of these sections linger long on the clear-cut contrasts between true Christianity and its opposition: false teachers in Corinth, improper responses by the Corinthians, and inappropriate application of the old covenant in the age of the new. More strikingly, both sections focus heavily on key OT Scriptures which bear on the situation in Corinth. J. McDonald has perceptively suggested that these two sections form the beginning and end of a midrashic homily, following Jewish convention of citing a catena of texts at the start and climax of various units of preaching material.[37] Nevertheless, because Paul dwells repeatedly on so many themes close to his heart in this epistle--joy in the midst of suffering, the blessing and comfort of God, his apostolic authority and integrity, the appeal to the Corinthians to be reconciled to him, to each other, and to God-what will be needed to defend the detail of the proposed chiasmus is unique, verbal parallelism between the various paired sections.

(3) In fact close verbal parallels do exist, pairing each of the main sectjons of the outline with its counterpart. Paul's "boasting" in the Corinthians and his urging them "to boast" in him are linked by the repetition of καύχησις, καύχημα, καυχάομαι, (1:12, 14; 7:14[2x]). The sections on Paul's painful letter and the repentant excommunicant are dominated by words for "grief"—λύπη/λυπέω (2:1, 2[2x], 3[2x], 4, 5[2x], 7; 7:8[2x], 9[3x], 10[2x], 11). 7:5-6 repeats the language of 2:13 very closely: ἐξῆλθον εἰς Μακεδονίαν ("I went away into Macedonia") becomes ἐλθόντων ἡμῶν εἰς Μακεδονίαν ("after we came to Macedonia"), οὐκ ἔσχηκα ἄνεσιν τοῦ πνεύματι μου ("I had no rest in my

[35] G. Bomkamm, "The History of the Origin of the So-Called Second Letter to the Corinthians," *NTS* 8 (1962) 259-60; R. Bultmann, De, zweite Brief an die Korinther (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1976) 23; E. Best, *Second Corinthians* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1987) 2.

[36] R. Holstad ("Eine Hellenistische Parallele zu 2. Kor. 6,3ff.," *ConNT* 9 [1944] 22-27) and A. Fridrichsen, ("Zum Thema 'Paulus und die Stoa': Eine stoische Stilparallele zu 2. Kor. 4,8f.," *ConNT* 9 [1944] 27-32) not only pointed out their similarity to each other but also to Hellenistic catalogues of suffering, esp. in Diogenes and Plutarch. The parallelism is made that much more obvious by the two articles' appearing back-to-back in the same source!

[37] J. I. H. McDonald, "Paul and the Preaching Ministry: A Reconsideration o£ 2 Cor. 2:14-17 in Its Context," *JSNT* 17 (1983) 43-47.

spirit") is balanced nicely by οὐδεμίαν ἔσχηκεν ἄνεσιν ἡ σάρξ ἡμῶν ("our flesh had no rest"), and μὴ εὑρεῖν με Τίτον ("my not finding Titus") corresponds to ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ Τίτου ("by the coming of Titus"). The fourth pair of passages is connected somewhat more loosely but the repetition of καρδία ("heart"--3:1, 3, 15; 4:6; 6:11; 7:3), παρρησία ("boldness"-3:12; 7:4), and θεοῦ ζῶντος ("living God"-3:13; 6:16) are all worth noting. More significantly, both 4:6 and 6:14 contrast "light" and "darkness" (φῶς, σκότος). Sections E and E' are linked most obviously by the catalogs of sufferings enumerated, but there is also verbal parallelism in the introductory combinations of θλιβόμενοι οὐ στενοχωρούμενοι ("being afflicted but not distressed"--4:8) and ἐν θλίψεσιν . . . ἐν στενοχωρίας ("in afflictions. . . in distresses--6:4).

(4) Only superficial familiarity with this epistle is required to recognize that the terminology identified as parallel in each case epitomizes central concerns of Paul rather than peripheral issues.[38]

(5) Not all of these terms and phrases are entirely unparalleled in 2 Cor 1:12-7:16, but overall their frequency in the sections paired as opposites is significant. Paul's only other boasting comes in 5:12 and 7:4, and the former verse, in which both verbal and nominal forms appear, falls in the center of the chiasmus, where one expects thoughts from the "extremes" to be reiterated. In light of his seventeen uses of this word group in chaps. 10-13, the relative infrequency of his "boasts" in these opening chapters makes those references which do occur that much more worthy of notice. The grief which dominates 1:23-2:11 and 7:8-13 never recurs elsewhere in chaps. 1-7, and only once in the rest of the entire epistle (9:7). The phrases linking 2:13 with 7:5-6 are wholly unparalleled. As for D and D', "heart" re-appears three times outside of the passages which are matched, but the specific expressions for "boldness" and "the living God" are unique. "Darkness" occurs nowhere else in 2 Corinthians; "light," only in 11:14. "Tribulations" and "distresses," which link E and E', occur elsewhere separately but never together, a fact all the more suggestive since Paul pairs στενοχωρία and θλίψις in two of its other three NT occurrences (Rom 2:9; 8:35; diff. 2 Cor 12:101).

(6) The identification of five sections to each "half" of the chias-mus clearly satisfies the criterion of multiple correspondences. Addi-tionally, each pair has several features or several occurrences of the same feature in common. In addition to the general headings and specific linguistic details already listed, the following observations

---

[38] The most comprehensive work on the theology of 2 Corinthians remains K. Prumm, *Diakonia Pneumatos I-III* (Freiburg: Herder, 1960-67). More briefly, cf. M. Rissi, *Studien zum zweiten Korintherbrief* (Zurich: Zwingli, 1969).

lend further credence to the outline at the point where most proposals fail--finding a plausible way to incorporate 6:14-7:1 into the larger context. To begin with, 6:11-13 and 7:2-4 form an oft-noted unity, so that if the intervening verses are not an interpolation, then 6:11-7:4 forms an aba' pattern itself.[39] In both a and a' Paul pleads for the Corinthians to open or widen their hearts to accept his friendship and authority once again, reassuring them of his affection for them. He thus "cushions the blow" which 6:14-7:1 would inevitably land, with their stem injunctions to keep separate from all manner of evil.[40] It is even likely that the partnership with unrighteousness which is apparently plaguing some in Corinth (6:14) is the very reason why they are restrained in their response to Paul (6:12).[41] But if they recognize their status as God's children (6:18), and act morally as that status demands, then they will be able to accept Paul's relationship to them as a father to his spiritual children (6:13).

Not only does 6:14-7:1 thus have logical links with the verses which frame it, but it also contains an internal chiasmus. Paul has arranged his four OT citations in vv. 16-18 so that they begin and end with verbally parallel promises of God (ἔσομαι αὐτῶν θεὸς καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔσονται μου λαός ["I will be their God and they will be my people"]/ ἔσομαι ὑμῖν εἰς πατέρα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔσεσθε μοι εἰς υἱοὺς καὶ θυγατέρας ["I will be father to you and you will be to me as sons and daughters"]). In between, he sandwiches two conceptually parallel imperatives: "come out from them and be separate" and "touch no unclean thing."

Interestingly, the passage opposite 6:11-7:4 also divides into a careful chiastic pattem-abcb'a'. In 2:14-16a and 4:3-6 Paul contrasts the two opposite fates of those who accept or reject the gospel--life vs. death and light vs. darkness. The passages 2:16b-3:3 and 4:1-2 both compare the integrity 6f Paul's ministry with the deceit of the false teachers. Paul needs no letters of "commendation" (3:1) because he "commends" himself to everyone's conscience (4:2).[42] In between, 3:4-18 explores the relationship between old and new covenants, comparing the transient glory of the letter of the Law which kills with the permanent glory of the Spirit of Christ which gives life. Thus in

---

[39] J. Lambrecht, "The Fragment 2 Cor vi 14-vii I: A Plea for Its Authenticity," Miscellanea Neotestamentica II (eds. T. Baarda, A. F. J. Klijn, W. C. van Unnik; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 147.

[40] Plummer, *Second Corinthians, xxv;* Hughes, *Second Corinthians*, 244.

[41] E.-B. Allo, *Seconde epitre aux Corinthiens* (Paris: Gabalda, 1956) 183; Harris, "2 Corinthians," 303.

[42] On 4:1-6 as summarizing 2:15-3:18, see T. E. Provence, "'Who Is Sufficient for These Things?' An Exegesis of 2 Corinthians ii 15-iii 18," *NovT* 24 (1982) 57.

2:14-4:6, Paul proceeds from an appeal for the Corinthians to accept him because the Spirit of the living God written on their hearts is his letter of recommendation, to a sharp contrast between the life-giving Spirit and life-killing letter via exposition from the OT teaching on new and old covenants, to the theological indicative that they are being more and more conformed to Christ's likeness.[43] Similarly, in 6:11- 7:4, Paul begins with an appeal for the Corinthians to accept him into their hearts, moves on to a sharp contrast between Christ's bestowing righteousness and Belial's producing sin in the temple of the living God, and concludes with the ethical imperative of perfection in holiness. The similarity is sufficient to render unnecessary any recourse to misplaced letters or major digressions.

(7) Every division in the proposed chiasmus appears as a major or minor break in the Nestle-Aland Greek NT and is supported by various commentaries.[44] Not all command the consensus that 2:13 and 7:4 do, but if they did then the problem of the outline would already have been solved! Much of the disagreement stems from the fact that Paul's logic contains regular transitional paragraphs which can easily be taken as either concluding a previous thought or beginning a new thought, unless an overarching structure makes it clear what must fit where.[45]

(8) The center of the chiasmus certainly creates a fitting climax. Paul has already proclaimed to the Corinthians "Jesus Christ and him crucified" as the heart of his gospel (1 Cor 2:2). No more appropriate center for 2 Cor 1-7 could be found. Paul perseveres in his ministry because he is convinced that "Christ died for all" (5:14), offering a restored relationship between God and men (5:19), and enabling those who are "in Christ" to become new creations (5:17). Like ambassadors, they in turn proclaim the forgiveness of sins to others (5:20). Paul thus describes Jesus' ministry as one of reconciliation, a ministry which then becomes the mandate of the believer once he is reconciled to God (5:18-20). Verse 21 concludes this section with one of the strongest statements of the substitutionary atonement in all of

---

[43] For more on the self-contained unity and structure of 2:14-4:6, see esp. J. Lambrecht, "Structure and Line of Thought in 2 Cor 2, 14-4,6," *Bib* 64 (1983) 344-80. Cf. also C. J. A. Hickling, "The Sequence of Thought in II Corinthians, Chapter Three," *NTS* 21 (1974-75) 380-95.

[44] See e.g., Barrett (*Second Corinthians*, 51) for major breaks at 1:22; 2:13; 4:6; 5:10; and 5:21; Tasker (*Second Corinthians*, 30) for 2:11 and 6:10; and Harris ("2 Corinthians," 317) for 7:4., 13a, and 7:16.

[45] In three instances, the correspondences I have pointed out often fall in the central parts of a given section as I have subdivided the text so that minor alterations in the "seams" would 1eave the chiastic structure unaffected. Thus 1:23-24 could be taken as the end of A, 1:15-22 as the start of B, or 6:1-2 as the end of F.

the NT: "for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."[46]

(9) There is no question of dislocation in the outline to ruin the symmetry and weaken the hypothesis. Each member of the first part of the chiasmus reappears in its proper place in the second.

III. *Implications of This Structure*

The significance of identifying a chiastic outline as the structural key to a given text in many ways differs little from that of any other type of outline; it better enables the expositor to follow the author's progression of thought and to emphasize the points which he emphasized and to subordinate those he subordinated.[47] Additionally, however, certain unique features arise, three of which may be elaborated briefly.[48]

(1) The climax of a chiasmus is its center, as already stressed. Second Corinthians has often been viewed as one of Paul's less theological and more pastoral letters, primarily because the reply to his opponents in Corinth occupies so much of his attention. Certainly he spends a majority of his time dealing with his relationship with the Corinthians and those who are opposing him. But in any piece of writing, the main points are not necessarily those which appear most often but which recur in the most strategic or emphatic positions in the outline. This should cause one to think again about the significance of 5:11-21 for 2 Cor 1-7. It would seem that a strong case can be made for seeing these verses as containing the central point which Paul was trying to make. Yes, Paul earnestly desires the Corinthians to accept his authority and advice, but such acceptance can occur only as they recognize their sin and acknowledge the one who became sin to make them righteous. They must be transformed into new creatures in Christ on the basis of his cross-work and reconciled to one

[46] Attempts to describe the NT's views on the death of Christ without employing this concept remain truncated. See esp. J. I. Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution," *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974) 3-45. On 5:21 in particular, Harris ("2 Corinthians," 354) offers these balanced comments: "it seems Paul's intent to say more than that Christ was made a sin-offering and yet less than that Christ became a sinner." Cf. M. Tolbert, "Theology and Ministry: 2 Corinthians 5:11-21," *Faith and Mission* 1 (1983) 63-70: "Jesus in his suffering and death plumbed the depths of the human situation of despair and alienation that results from the reign of sin."

[47] See esp. W. C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981); J. H. Hayes and C. R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), and note the comments on chiasmus, 73-74.

[48] In addition to the works cited in nn. 6 and 16 above, see R.E. Man, "The Value of Chiasm for New Testament Interpretation," *BSac* 141 (1984) 146-57.

another as the hallmark of their ongoing ministry. And Christ' cruci-
fixion may not be separated from his resurrection. Paul's changed
attitude toward others is based on no longer knowing Christ as merely
human (5:16). Tellingly, each of these points seems to be precisely
what Paul's opposition in Corinth denied.[49] The passage 5:11-21 pro-
vides the theological basis which alone can make possible the practi-
cal and pastoral solution to these conflicts. Whether or not Martin is
right in identifying "reconciliation" as the center of Pauline theology
as a whole,[50] the strategic location of this topic in 2 Corinthians makes
it a strong candidate for the central theme of the major section of this
letter.

    (2) The second most significant parts of a chiasmus are its outer
boundaries (A and A'), especially if their theme recurs in the center.
In 1:12-7:16, this theme emerged as proper and improper boasting.
The topic appears in the center of the chiasmus as well (5:11-12). The
dominant role of boasting in chaps. 10-13 confirms its central function
for Paul's relationship with the Corinthians and ties those chapters a
little more closely together with the preceding nine.[51] Furthermore, it
places into perspective the specific problems with which Paul has to
deal en route--the penitent sinner, the right attitude to the apostolic
ministry, and victory in the midst of suffering. If the Corinthians are
hurting themselves and distorting the gospel via an overly-realized
eschatology leading to triumphalist ecclesiology,[52] the opposite dan-
ger lurks not too far distant-an overemphasis on humility and suffer-
ing. Against both extremes 1:12 provides the proper antidote: "not by
earthly wisdom but by the grace of God," which alone enables the

[49] The standard work on Paul's opponents in Corinth remains D. Georgi, *Die Gegner des Paulus im 2. Korintherbrief* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1964). Geg-ner sees proto-Gnostics behind the opposition addressed in 1 Corinthians and Hel-lenistic Jewish Christian itinerants behind 2 Corinthians. For an approach which sees more strictly Judaizing opposition, see esp. J. J. Gunther, *St. Pauf s Opponents and Their Background* (SupplNT 35, Leiden: Brill, 1973). Quite possibly both sides infer more than can be determined with certainty; see Furnish, II Corinthians, 48-54.

[50] R. P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981). On the problem of identifying such a center, see H. W. Boers, "The Foundations of Paul's Thought: A Methodological Investigation--The Problem of the Coherent Center of Paul's Thought," *ST* 42 (1988) 55-68.

[51] In fact, P. F. Ellis (*Seven Pauline Letters* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1982] 140-41) plausibly suggests that all of 2 Corinthians was an original unity, in light of its overall ABA' pattern (chaps. 1-7, 8-9, 10-13). Cf. also F. Young and D. F. Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1987) 27.

[52] A. C. Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology at Corinth," *NTS* 24 (1978) 510-26; C. L. Mearns, "Early Eschatological Development in Paul: The Evidence of 1 Corin-thians," *JSNT* 22 (1984) 19-35; D. A. Carson, *From Triumphalism to Maturity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984).

Corinthians to receive Titus in the godly "fear and trembling" with which 7:15 concludes. "Boasting" as self-confidence is better than despair, but it must be directed to the Lord rather than oneself. Yet, as 5:11-13 elucidates, if one wants others to be proud of him in the way God would be, one may need to act in a manner which makes some think he is "out of his mind."

(3) The passages 6:14-7:1 and 2:14-7:4 need not be seen as separate letters, quotations of other writings, or even significantly digressive. The transitions between different parts of a chiasmus are often fairly abrupt, some more so than others. The roughest transition in the first half of 2 Cor 1-7, from 2:13-14, has been well explained by S. Hafemann. Paul's failure to find Titus during his travels reminds him of the triumphal procession of a Roman conqueror, leading his captives behind him to their deaths.[53] Far from looking ahead to later victory,[54] Paul imagines himself as a prisoner soon to die (cf. the sacrificial language in vv 15-16), but he is able to praise God anyway. Paul's discussion then proceeds by catchwords. The letters of recommendation call to mind the letter of the Law; the glory of the Law was represented by the glory on Moses' face, the veil which covered that glory contrasts with unveiled reading of Scripture by Christians, and so on.[55] After the chiasmus of 2:14-4:6, Paul qualifies the victory believers have in Christ with the enumeration of sufferings which must precede their resurrection (4:7-5:10). But the reconciliation accomplished makes it all worthwhile (5:11-21).

The links between sections of the reverse sequence of the chiasmus prove more tenuous, and the paralleled sectjons prove noticeably shorter. But this is precisely what one should expect. Resumptive discussions need not dwell on detail already treated at length. And as the "second half" of a chiasmus unfolds, allusions to the corresponding passages in the "first half" will naturally make successive sections seem

---

[53] S. J. Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit* (WUNT 2/19; Tubingen: Mohr, 1986) 84-85. Cf. P. Marshall, "A Metaphor of Social Shame: θριαμβεύειν in 2 Cor 2:14," *NovT* 25 (1983) 302-17.

[54] As has usually been argued; see the survey of views in M. E. Thrall, "A Second Thanksgiving Period in II Corinthians," *JSNT* 16 (1982) 102-11. As a variant of this tradition, J. Murphy-O'Connor ("Paul and Macedonia: The Connection Between 2 Corinthians 2.13 and 2.14," *JSNT* 25 [1985] 99-103) argues that the positive associations Paul had with churches in Macedonia triggered this thanksgiving. Thrall herself argues that Paul introduces a second thanksgiving (112-24), but it is not clear why Paul would put it precisely at this point.

[55] See esp. J. A. Fitzmyer, "Glory Reflected on the Face of Christ (2 Cor 3:7-4:6) and a Palestinian Jewish Motif," *TS* 42 (1981) 630-44. Cf. also G. Wagner, "Alliance de la lettre, alliance de l'Espirit: Essai d'analyse de 2 Corinthiens 2/14 a 3/18," *ETR* 60 (1985) 55-65.

less apt in their immediate context and more reminiscent of earlier material. Thus Paul resumes the discussion of his travels in 7:5 not so much because he has finished an extended excursus but because he has reached the appropriate point in his outline at which to do so. A similar explanation undoubtedly accounts for at least part of the seeming irrelevance of 6:11-7:4 to its context as well;[56] Paul is again reflecting on the OT concepts of glory and holiness to which he had devoted so much of chap. 3. Although his first quotation in 6:16 draws on Lev 26:11-12, while 3:7-18 has been termed a midrash on Exodus 34,[57] the concepts involved are scarcely dissimilar. In terms of the historical narrative of the Pentateuch the situation is unaltered from the earlier passage to the later one: the Israelites remain encamped at Sinai, receive the Law, and await their marching orders. Certainly the concepts of living with Israel, being her God, and commanding them to separate from everything unclean encapsulate the most urgent parts of the message which God had to deliver through Moses when he returned from Mt. Sinai the second time, even if the actual quotations .come from further on in the OT (2 Sam 7:14; Isa 52:11; and Ezek 20:34; 37:27).

IV. *Objections Considered*

I close by replying to three potential objections. First, is not an intricate, artistic device like chiasmus incompatible with Paul's having written 2 Corinthians as a deeply personal, emotional, and almost ad hoc reply to those in Corinth who would oppose him? This question reflects the earlier view of chiasmus which largely limited its use to meticulously structured works of poetry. But as already observed, recent studies have shown that chiasmus had thoroughly permeated the ancient Near East, and in fact some of the most difficult and elaborate examples reflect moving *Sitze im Leben*.[58] Literary style, including

---

[56] Great strides have been made in demonstrating the authenticity of 6:14- 7:1 and its place within 6:11-7:4, but why Paul placed this section where he did has been less adequately treated. Cf. G. D. Fee, "II Corinthians VI.14- VII. 1 and Food Offered to Idols," *NTS* 23 (1977) 140-61; J. D. M, Derrett, "2 Cor 6, 14ff.: A Midrash on Dt 22, 10," *Bib* 59 (1978) 231-50; M. E. Thrall, "The Problem of II Cor. VI.14- VII.l in Some Recent Discussion," *NTS* 24 (1978) 132-48; J. Murphy-O'Connor, "Relating 2 Corinthians 6.14-7.1 to Its Context," *NTS* 33 (1987) 272-75; idem, "Philo and 2 Cor 6:14-7:1," *RB* 95 (1988) 55-69. .

[57] See esp. A. T. Hanson, "The Midrash in II Corinthians 3: A Reconsideration," JSNT 9 (1980) 2-28. But cf. E. Richard, "Polemics, Old Testament, and Theology: A Study of II Cor., III,1-IV,6," *RB* 88 (1981) 340-67, who points out how the new covenant of Jeremiah is in fact the dominant topic throughout.

[58] One thinks e.g. of many of the psalms (cf. R. L. Alden, "Chiastic Psalms," *JETS* 11 [1974] 11:28; 19 [1976] 191-200; 21 [1978] 199-210), the Book of Esther (cf. S. B.

chiasmus, colored even such non-literary materials as Aramaic con-
tracts and Athenian inscriptions[59] and thus is certainly compatible with
Paul's level of "occasional" writing. And Paul need not have had his
whole outline planned from the outset. He could well have reached the
end of chap. 5, knowing that he had left several topics unfinished along
the way, and then have chosen to elaborate them beginning with that
which he had treated most recently.

Second, if Paul has outlined these chapters chiastically, why has
he not used this device elsewhere for major sections of his epistles?
This objection overlooks the fact that 2 Cor 1-7 is unconventionally
structured *vis-a-vis* Paul's other writings regardless of what device
one utilizes to explain its structure; it applies with equal force to
outlines which resort to epistolary fragments and major digressions.
On the other hand, numerous smaller sections of Paul's letters un-
deniably do employ chiasmus.[60] T. Shoemaker's recent analysis of
1 Cor 11:2-16 provides an excellent illustration.[61] Moreover, at least
one complete letter, Philemon, seems to fall naturally into a sequence
of inverted parallelism.[62] Remarkably, Philemon is the most occa-
sional and personal of all, of Paul's writings, so this would afford a
striking parallel to the chiastic outline of 2 Cor 1-7 if it were valid.
And in at least some instances it seems that Paul employs the simpler
ABA and ABB' A' forms to structure entire epistles.[63]

Finally, if this is the true structure of 2 Cor 1-7, why has not
anyone ever noticed it before? Such a question, often resorted to
when all other debate reaches an impasse, misses the mark for at least
three reasons. First, it could equally be applied to many commen-
tators' outlines of these chapters since there is little agreement as to
why Paul is doing what he is doing. Second, as with most chiastic

Berg, *The Book of Esther* [Missoula,MT: Scholars Press, 1979] 106-13, or the Song of
Solomon (cf. W. H. Shea, "The Chiastic Structure of the Song of Songs," *ZAW* 92
[1980] 378-96).

[59] B. Porten, "Structure and Chiasm in Aramaic Contracts and Letters," in Welch,
Chiasmus, 169-82; K. J. Dover, "The Colloquial Stratum in Classical Attic Prose,"
Classical Contributions (eds. G. S. Shrimp ton and D. J. McCargar; Locust Valley, NY:
J. J. Augustin, 198i) 15-25. I am indebted to Dr. S. Porter of Biola University, Los
Angeles, for this last reference.

[60] See esp. J. Jeremias, "Chiasmus in den Paulusbriefen," *ZNW* 49 (1958) 145-56.
Less uniformly persuasive are the various examples in Lund, Chiasmus, 139-225; Di
Marco, *Chiasmo*, 153-78; and J. W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the New Testament," in
Welch, *Chiasmus*, 213-90.

[61] T. P. Shoemaker, "Unveiling of Equality: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16," *BTB* 17 (1987)
60-63.

[62] T. Boys, *Tactica Sacra* (London: T. Hamilton, 1824) 65-67.

[63] In addition to the examples scattered among the sources listed in n. 60 above,
see esp. Ellis, *Letters*, passim.

outlines, most of the building blocks have been observed by different people at different times;[64] what has been lacking was for someone to recognize the whole and construct a synthesis. Third, and most significantly, chiastic structures seldom appear unless one is looking for them. By that I do not mean that they are all the inventions of overly creative minds, imposing on the text a structure which was never intended, though many proposed chiasms have been just that. Rather I mean that what was almost universally accepted as an artistic rhetorical and literary device and useful mnemonic aid in the Mediterranean cultures of antiquity has largely fallen into disuse in the modern period so that commentators simply are not accustomed to considering it. Yet even today, it has not disappeared; in some cases one fails to see it because it is so natural. K. Bailey gives a delightful example of a conversation he overheard between two young men, who entirely without design asked each other four questions and then answered them in inverse order: (l)=(A) "Are you coming to the party?" (2)=(B) "Can I bring a friend?" (l)=(C) "Boy or girl?" (2)=(D) "What difference does it make?" (l)=(D') "It is a matter of balance." (2)=(C') "Girl" (l)=(B') "O.K." (2)=(A') "I'll be there."[65] In Paul's case I suspect it was not nearly as subconscious but probably almost as natural.

[64] See esp. ibid., 140-41; note also the links between 1:1-2:13 and 7:15-16 pointed out by Georgi (Gegner, 22-23); and the incipiently chiastic outline of Barrett (*Second Corinthians,* 51).

[65] Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 50.