

PAUL AND HOW MANY “OTHERS”? A DISCOURSE ON ALTERITY IN 2  
CORINTHIANS

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by

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The Undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis examines Paul's use of the enigmatic expression *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* in 2 Corinthians 11:5 and suggests an interpretation that differs from prevailing scholarly interpretations. The expression appears in the context of Paul's boast that he thinks himself to be "not in the least inferior to these super-apostles."<sup>1</sup> This is the Greek so that it is clear to see where *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* comes from. "λογίζομαι γὰρ μηδὲν ὑστερηκένοι τῶν ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι." "Super-apostles" is a common modern translation of Paul's Greek, *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. What, precisely, is meant by this phrase? The Greek term *ὑπερλίαν* can mean "over and beyond", "above, more than" or "exceedingly."<sup>2</sup> It is therefore possible to render *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* in English as "the more than apostles", "the exceedingly more than apostles", "the superior apostles" or the "super-apostles". The question of Paul's tone here is significant for the interpretation of the term. The earliest commentators, church fathers such as Chrysostom, read the term as an indication of Paul's genuine admiration for these apostles.<sup>3</sup> Given the derisive language of the surrounding text, however, it is more likely that Paul's use of *ὑπερλίαν* is intended sarcastically. An examination of the general historical and cultural context of Paul's letters will shed more light on this question.

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from the Bible are from Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*

<sup>2</sup> Lidell & Scott

<sup>3</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company,

<sup>2</sup> Lidell & Scott

<sup>3</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1984), 502



There has been a great deal of scholarly debate surrounding the identity of these *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. Some scholars suggest that opponents of Paul in 2 Corinthians are Gnostics.<sup>4,5</sup> These scholars differ a bit on whether or not these Gnostics were of Jewish or Jewish Christian origin – the differences lie in some ideas that originated with Jewish thought, “Christian” thought, or “Judeo-Christian thought.” Other scholars propose that *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* were Jewish Christians who were directly or indirectly associated with the leadership of the church at Jerusalem, specifically Peter, James, and John.<sup>6,7,8</sup> C.D. Stanley argues that the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* are other Jewish Christians.<sup>9</sup> Another group of scholars argues that the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* in 2 Corinthians are Jews other than Paul.<sup>10</sup>

In this paper, I would like to propose an alternative interpretation of the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. Rather than identifying them with specific individuals, I suggest that Paul employs *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* in order to cast these opponents in nonspecific terms as an element of his discourse of alterity or as nonspecifically “other.” In the context of Paul’s writing, *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* appear to embody a general threat to Paul’s community; they represent ideas or teachings at odds with those he wishes his readers to embrace.

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<sup>4</sup> The term Gnostic here is a modern construction created to identify similar patterns of belief and practice across a wide variety of groups. The texts do not provide a definitively unified group and thus there are several types of Gnostics incorporating ideas that have a clear Judeo-Christian attribution but not all texts possess these characteristics.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Schmithals, Wilhelm Lütgert, Rudolf Bultman, Adolf Schlatter

<sup>6</sup> Ernst Käsemann, Ferdinand Christian Baur, and C.K. Barrett

<sup>7</sup> I recognize that while during the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD there was no such classification as Christian; for the sake of clarity I will use this label

<sup>8</sup> Käsemann proposes that the letters of recommendation mentioned in 2 Corinthians 3:1 are from the apostles in Jerusalem. (Georgi)

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Stanley, *Arguing the Scripture: Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul* (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2004)

<sup>10</sup> G. Friedrich, Dieter Georgi, Günther Bornkamm, and Victor Paul Furnish

Reading *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* in this manner allows us to shift the interpretative burden away from identifying *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* as specific historical individuals or groups to an understanding of the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* as a group Paul labels representing those who teach contradictory messages, “others.” That Paul uses rhetoric and rhetorical devices is not a new concept. What I am contributing to the discussion is that these devices enable us to appreciate how Paul construes them in terms of his own message and self-image as an apostle. This allows the opponents to be identified with more than one of the groups previous scholars have proposed. By defining his opponents as “other,” Paul allows for the focus to be on the message and not on the opponents. The “otherness” of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* becomes a universally applicable category. Paul achieves this through his adherence to and avoidance of rhetorical conventions. Paul adheres to the basics of rhetoric, appealing mostly to logic and ethos with some appeal to pathos, using proofs, minimizing certain actions, defining good within a deliberative letter, garnering good will, leaving opponents unnamed. Paul avoids rhetorical convention when he invents words and when he uses ambiguous language.

While Paul specifically names some of his opponents in 1 Corinthians (Cephas and Apollos) he does not name his opponents in 2 Corinthians. There are several ways to interpret Paul’s silence on the identity of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* here. Perhaps the reluctance to name his opponents stems from the reconciliatory nature of Paul’s epistle. Furnish argues that Paul would not have provided information on the background of the opponents in 2 Corinthians because there would have been no doubt about who the opponents were.<sup>11</sup> Another plausible reason for not naming the “super-apostles” could be

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<sup>11</sup> Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 48-49

that Paul is not referring to anyone in particular, but is merely suggesting a body of thought that differs from his own revelation. Moreover, leaving an opponent unnamed is a convention of rhetoric because naming the opponent would provide them status.<sup>12</sup> It seems reasonable to assert that Paul is writing about general opposition to his ideas here, rather than about a specific person or group. Paul writing in general terms may be validated in that Paul wrote his letters with the intention that they be read by the intended audience and then circulated throughout the rest of the churches.<sup>13</sup>

One thing that scholars do agree upon is that Paul perceives his opponents, or opposing viewpoints, in 2 Corinthians as a problem – they are dangerous to his young church at Corinth. More specifically Paul writes that the visitors’, that is the “super-apostles,” gospel endangers the devotion of the congregation at Corinth to Christ.<sup>14</sup> An additional danger, according to Paul, of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* is that they are outsiders; they are not from inside the Corinthians community. Barrett suggests in his interpretation of 2 Corinthians 10:2 that *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* are clearly different from the Corinthians.<sup>15</sup> Studying Paul’s words within the context of Barrett’s insight a question arises – which is more problematic, the fact that there are outsiders who have infiltrated the Corinthian community or the contradictory teaching that undermines Paul’s authority. Both are problematic and both appear to be the cause of Paul’s response. These outsiders are themselves “others” not merely in their message but in their very nature. Thus, reading the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* as Paul’s admonishment and caution to the Corinthians

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<sup>12</sup> Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 48-49

<sup>13</sup> Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 19

<sup>14</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:3-4

<sup>15</sup> Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, (New York): Harper & Row, 1973) 249

on the dangers of otherness – both the otherness of visitors and the otherness of messages in contradiction with what Paul taught.

Paul employs extremely derisive language when he discusses the *τῶν ὑπερλίαν ἀποστόλων* in 2 Corinthians, using terms such as false apostles, deceitful workmen, and even comparing these apostles to servants of Satan<sup>16</sup> providing more argument that Paul's use of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* is in fact an exercise in alterity. Lest the derisive language in 2 Corinthians appear atypical of Paul's communications there are other places where Paul employs derisive language but not in the same manner or to the same degree. Paul's response to his opponents in his other letters, for example Philippians and Galatians, is more moderate and controlled than his discussion of his opponents in 2 Corinthians. The opponents in Philippians and Galatians are more clearly delineated than in 2 Corinthians. The content of Paul's letters to the Philippians and Galatians allows for a reconstruction of the historic group of the opponents in those communities because Paul addresses specific arguments pointing out circumcision as a major issue. Paul's content in 2 Corinthians is much more ambiguous. The major issues in 2 Corinthians, where Paul specifically engages the disagreement with the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*, are centered on teachings that are dissimilar to his own. The only specifics Paul gives are that the gospel, Jesus, and spirit are separate to his own.

Paul did encounter real opposition in Corinth that influenced his polemic response and influences how we read *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. Although the focus of the paper is on interpreting *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* as a general nonspecific entity, considering the relationship between Paul and the group assists the interpretation because Paul projects

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<sup>16</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

such animosity toward this group due to the danger of their message. Paul's contemptuous and yet ambiguous treatment of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* allows for a general rather than specific interpretation of who the individual or group is. In an attempt to provide further illumination on *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* first consider the relationship between Paul and this group. In order to reconstruct the relationship between Paul and *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* one must consider the language Paul employs and the focus of Paul's arguments. The precise nature of Paul's relationship with *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* is not known; his language here leaves it unclear whether Paul had ever met them, or even whether he knew their names. The derisive language used to describe the "super-apostles" and the forceful defense of Paul's own authority vis-à-vis their teachings suggest that Paul's relationship with these particular opponents is strained, at best. The ambiguity of Paul's relationship with the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*, the forceful defense of Paul's authority, and Paul's vitriolic language permit a reading of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* as a nonspecific entity and as "otherness." The focus is not on the people of the conflicting message but the conflicting message itself.

A broader definition of opponent, specifically in 2 Corinthians, presents itself when the reader reads the term *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* sarcastically within context of the surrounding contemptuous language including the rhetorical convention of naming the opponents, and without clearly presenting specific points of contention. This allows for an identification of a nonspecific entity, a generalization of anyone who teaches a separate gospel, Christ, or Spirit – any idea or gospel or person at odds with that he wishes his readers to embrace, rather than focusing on an historical individual or group. The generalization of the opponents and the importance of any message different from

what Paul teaches affects Paul's language. Three factors, the polarized message and Paul's belief of the danger of the contradictory message to his community in Corinth and Paul's belief that the opponents are dangerous in and of themselves, influence Paul's response and thus he responds in such a polemic manner as to utilize vitriolic language.

In order to interpret *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* correctly several steps will be taken. The first step is to provide previous scholarship on the matter, as many scholars have already proposed solutions for identifying *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* with specific historic groups. A brief summary of previous scholarship on the identification of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*, will be followed by a synopsis of the background of Corinth providing the historical and cultural context of Paul's writings to the Corinthians. A condensed discussion on letter writing context will provide the contemporaneous expectations of letter writing to which Paul was accustomed because Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians is in letter form. An analysis of rhetorical context will provide more information on Paul's argument and shed more light on *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. A summary of the Corinthians correspondence will provide more background to understand Paul's use of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* and assist in interpreting whom he referenced. Providing further framework for his use of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* is Paul's own words and his presentation of his opponents in other correspondences, Philippians, Galatians, and 1 Thessalonians and Paul's presentation of his opponents in 2 Corinthians. After presenting this information a final analysis and conclusion will complete the paper. Reading through the conventions of letter writing, rhetoric, and comparing Paul's treatment of his opponents in Philippians, Galatians, and 1 Thessalonians with his treatment in 2 Corinthians will provide an understanding that *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* is a significant group, perhaps even

specific historic group, Paul's treatment provides an interpretation that allows for a general nonspecific identification of "other."

## Chapter 2

### Previous Analysis

#### 2.1 Jewish Christians of the Church at Jerusalem

A review of the previous analysis regarding the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* benefits the current study by providing information on where the field of research has been and where it is currently. There are many different assumptions about who the historical group is that Paul referred to when he used the term *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. The traditional view of the opponents in 2 Corinthians is that there are two groups – the super-apostles and the false apostles. This traditional view was first presented by patristic commentators such as John Chrysostom and is echoed in the work of modern scholars such as F.C. Baur, Ernst Käsemann, etc<sup>17</sup>. This theory often includes speculations that the “super-apostles” were from the church at Jerusalem or perhaps at least some kind of envoy from the church at Jerusalem. In this traditional interpretation, “super-apostles” is either used as a reverential term or as a traditional title for the leaders from the church at Jerusalem. It has been proposed that the term “super-apostles” may refer to well-known apostles such as Peter, James, and John. Barrett explains that there are three groups that Paul addresses in 2 Corinthians 10-13, the Corinthians “over whom Paul grieves,” the false

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<sup>17</sup> Baur, *The Church History of the First Three Centuries* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1878-1879); C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973); C.K. Barrett, *On Paul: Aspects of His Life, Work, and Influence in the Early Church* (London: T&T Clark, 2003).



apostles, and other apostles who have some recognized stature in addition to some relationship with the false apostles.<sup>18</sup>

Barrett allows the possibility that Paul's opponents may have separated from those who originally provided the letters of recommendation, explaining that it was plausible for envoys to disregard their patrons' wishes after leaving their presence.<sup>19</sup> However, Barrett disagrees on the overall classification of Jewish Christians from the church at Jerusalem. Baur postulates that Paul and his opponents were at odds based on apostolic authority. Paul claimed authority from a vision of the risen Christ while the opponents had a tangible historical relationship with Jesus.<sup>20</sup> Baur contends that the "super-apostles" were in fact members of the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem with Peter as the leader.<sup>21</sup> Baur supports his argument by proposing that only the "Mother Church" could have produced letters of recommendation that would be accepted in churches abroad.<sup>22</sup> Schmithals counters Baur's argument that *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* were either directly or indirectly associated with the Jewish Christian community at Jerusalem by revealing the unlikelihood that Paul would speak so harshly to this group if they were in fact the leaders of the community at Jerusalem while at the same time collecting for them.

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<sup>18</sup> Barrett, *A Commentary on The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 245

<sup>19</sup> Barrett, *On Paul: Aspects of His Life, Work, and Influence in the Early Church*.

<sup>20</sup> Baur, *The Church History of the First Three Centuries*, 61

<sup>21</sup> Baur, *The Church History of the First Three Centuries*, 63-64

<sup>22</sup> Baur, *The Church History of the First Three Centuries*, 63-64

## 2.2 Members from Jewish Christian Communities Outside of Jerusalem

Although most scholars, those who propose that the opponents were in fact Jewish Christians, suggest that Paul's opponents were directly connected to the first apostles in Jerusalem, there are a few who suggest that the opponents were not the apostles of Jerusalem nor their immediate subordinates.<sup>23</sup> Stanley argues that the opponents are most likely some sort of Jewish Christians but neither the apostles of Jerusalem nor their immediate subordinates.

Although the focus of Stanley's book is on Paul's use of the Septuagint as a means of rhetoric it still provides some understanding about Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians. Stanley suggests that there may have been several groups in the Corinthian audience, including both Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians. He argues that Paul expected the Jewish Christians to continue teaching and elucidating the "biblical foundation."<sup>24</sup> Although Paul often quotes scriptures in his letters, in his discussion of the "super-apostles" Paul does not quote the Septuagint. Stanley proposes this lack of quoting the Septuagint was because Paul knew his audience was hostile to him and that they questioned his apostolic authority, something raised by the opponents. Stanley's argument assumes that the opposition is somehow connected with the church at Jerusalem because of the reference to the letters of recommendation mentioned in 2 Corinthians 3:1 "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Surely we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you, do we?" Furthermore Stanley

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<sup>23</sup> Christopher Stanley, *Arguing with the Scriptures: Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Stanley, *Arguing with Scripture: The Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul*, 2

says Paul recognizes the hesitancy of the audience to accept his interpretations of the Septuagint which is why he does not quote the Septuagint much in his defense to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians. The letters of recommendation are not explicitly cited as from Jerusalem.

Barrett takes this a step further and proposes that not only were the opponents of Palestinian origin but that they also “exercised a Judaizing influence.”<sup>25</sup> He defines “Judaizer” as one “who maintained a legalist position without insisting upon these expressions of it.”<sup>26</sup> He explains that Paul argues against those who were Jews and emphasized that heritage.<sup>27</sup> The identification of the opponents as having a Jewish background explains why Paul defends himself as a Hebrew and Israelite.<sup>28</sup>

Schmithals argues against these scholars who propose that the opponents in 2 Corinthians were “Judaizers” by revealing that “Paul does not slip into anti-Judaistic polemics with a single word.”<sup>29</sup> Schmithals further argues that there is nothing in the Corinthian correspondence to signify that the opponents were associated with the church at Jerusalem – including the fact that Paul would not speak so harshly to the Jerusalem apostles if he were collecting for them – and there is no indication that the false teachings are in any way Jewish teachings.<sup>30</sup> Although Barrett, Schmithals and other scholars have

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<sup>25</sup> Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 30

<sup>26</sup> Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 30 Barrett presents Peter (in Galatians) as the most visible example of a “Judaizer”

<sup>27</sup> Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 30

<sup>28</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:22

<sup>29</sup> Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth*, trans. John E Steely (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 118

<sup>30</sup> Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth*, 118-119

attempted to apply the term “Judaizer” to any of Paul’s opponents, this is actually an inaccurate term.<sup>31</sup>

Schmithals refutes many scholars’ theories of the “super-apostles” as Jewish Christians such as Baur’s assumptions that the opponents must be directly linked to the apostles at Jerusalem because otherwise letters of reference would not provide the required authority. Schmithals negates Käsemann’s assumption that the “super-apostles” were in fact directly connected to the church at Jerusalem and to the first apostles sent out to test Paul’s apostleship by pointing out that even Käsemann is unable to explain exactly what the standard of the test was – it was purely suggestive. Schmithals’s argument against Käsemann’s assumption of the apostles at Jerusalem testing Paul is convincing. Purely suggestive standards of testing Paul without other evidence lack substance. While Schmithals’ counter argument is convincing his proposal that the opponents of Paul in 2 Corinthians are Gnostics is less convincing.

Georgi identifies the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* as Jewish missionaries who were making claims regarding their miraculous powers. He references the activities of the opponents as evidence of the missionary nature and Paul’s use of the term *ἐργάται* (work/toil).<sup>32</sup> This is the theory of the ‘divine man’ – the man of God was expected to be some sort of miracle worker – for which there is not significant evidence before Christianity had firmly taken root; consequently, the best parallels come from the third

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<sup>31</sup> “Judaizer” is essentially an artificial construction and has been misappropriated. Paul uses the term in Galatians in specific reference to Peter’s withdrawal from table fellowship with Gentiles at Antioch and during his persecution phase. Personal correspondence with Dr. Chris Seeman, June 24, 2013

<sup>32</sup> Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians*, 38, 40

century and later.<sup>33</sup> Barrett concludes the identification of the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* most makes sense as Hellenized Jews.<sup>34</sup> He cites Paul's discussion of his ethnic background in 2 Corinthians 11 as supporting evidence.

Michael Gorman combined the notion that the opponents were Gnostics and Jewish Christians, neither Paul nor the leaders of the church at Jerusalem. He suggests that the opponents of Paul in 2 Corinthians are in fact Jewish Christian pneumatics, or 'Spirit people'<sup>35</sup>. He argues that Paul was not concerned with the Jewish identity of the opponents as much as it was "their claim of having a Spirit-filled ministry of Christ that is problematic."<sup>36</sup> Gorman provides Corinthians 2:17 and 1:12 as his supporting evidence.

Scholars provide a variety of conclusions on the historic identity of Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians. The conclusions are not limited to opponents with Jewish background or even Jewish Christian background. Some scholars focus on the teachings and ideas of the opponents rather than the ethnic background.

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<sup>33</sup> Lee Martin McDonald and Porter Stanley E., *Early Christianity and Its Sacred Literature* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 448

<sup>34</sup> Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 28-29

<sup>35</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 290

<sup>36</sup> Gorman, *The Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, 290

## 2.3 Gnostics

Addressing the notion that the “super-apostles” are Gnostics, Schmithals suggests that *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* represent followers of Gnosticism. Bultmann and Schmithals claim that the opponents are Gnostics, noting the willingness to trade on ecstatic experience and the focus on logos and gnosis<sup>37, 38</sup>. He defines Gnosticism as characterized by, “a pronounced understanding of the world and of self, and a distinctive mythology of the expression of that understanding.”<sup>39</sup> Schmithals explains that the two must be together for the phenomenon to truly be Gnosticism. Paul’s opponents in Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Rome are the focus of Schmithals’s study of Paul’s opponents. He proposes a connection between the opponents in Corinthians and in Philippians. Schmithals furthers his argument suggesting that because Paul had already dealt with these opponents once it allows for Paul’s harsh language in Corinthians.<sup>40</sup> He critiques Lütgert and Schlatter’s theories that the opponents of 2 Corinthians as Gnostics. Lütgert’s theory provides an explanation that the opponents were Gnostics “without making it clear how they proclaim *another* Pneuma than does Paul (II, 11:4).”<sup>41</sup> Schmithals questions Lütgert’s inability to explain “what is the content of this Gnosis, and how it is a gospel that saves, even if it is ‘another gospel’ (II, 11:4).”<sup>42</sup> Schmithals critiques Schlatter’s assumption that the opponents of 2 Corinthians are indeed Gnostics

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<sup>37</sup> Rudolf Bultman, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, trans. Roy A Harrisville (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 200

<sup>38</sup> McDonald and Porter, *Early Christianity and its Sacred Literature*, 448

<sup>39</sup> Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth*, 29

<sup>40</sup> Barrett, *On Paul*, 77

<sup>41</sup> Schmithals, Walter *Gnosticism in Corinth*, trans. John E. Steely, 1971, 121

<sup>42</sup> Schmithals, Walter *Gnosticism in Corinth*, trans. John E. Steely, 1971, 121

but that they have a basis in Judaism. Although Schmithals criticizes Lütgert and Schlatter all three agree that the opponents of Paul in 2 Corinthians whom he calls *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* were Gnostics.

Schmithals argues that the opponents of Paul in 2 Corinthians were Gnostics based on his study of 2 Corinthians 11:4 – another Jesus, a strange spirit, and a strange gospel coupled with this research of later Gnosticism, specifically the debate between Celsus and Origen, suggesting that Gnostics were unable to become members without cursing Christ.<sup>43</sup> According to Schmithals, there must have been those in the Corinthian congregation who were cursing Jesus and this is the evidence he uses as support for identifying the strange spirit as Gnostic teaching. He provides 1 John as context for the specific Gnostic teachings on the difference “between Spirit-Christ and the man Jesus.”<sup>44</sup> Barrett suggests that although there may have been some “gnostic element” of Paul’s opponents in 2 Corinthians they were not Gnostics.<sup>45</sup>

McDonald and Porter argue, however, that Gnosticism was in all likelihood not sufficiently developed in the first century to make this theory plausible.<sup>46</sup> Georgi opposes the Gnostic identification of the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* stating that the opponents’ argument focused on Paul’s apostolic authority, with which Gnostics would not have been concerned.<sup>47</sup> He cites the opponents’ focus on exclusivity as another reason against identifying them as Gnostics.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth*, 128, 132 – Schmithals glosses ἕτερον as strange as opposed to different.

<sup>44</sup> Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth*, 127

<sup>45</sup> Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 30

<sup>46</sup> McDonald and Porter, *Early Christianity and Its Sacred Literature*

<sup>47</sup> Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians*, 34

<sup>48</sup> Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians*, 34

Scholars have debated whether or not Paul's use of the term *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* was sarcastic or not. The first commentators on Paul suggest that Paul's use of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* indicated Paul's admiration for the first apostles, more specifically those in the Jerusalem community – Peter, James, and John. This thought, that is the genuine adoration of Paul for the group he calls *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*, continued throughout Pauline studies down into the works of Baur. Other scholars have recognized that Paul's use of the term *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* is indeed sarcastic. The commonly held opinion among scholars today is that Paul's tone is sarcastic.

Scholars debate the precise identification of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. Some scholars suggest that the historical group Paul references can be identified as the apostles of the Jewish community at Jerusalem, specifically Peter, James, and John. Other scholars suggest that Paul refers to members of a Jewish community other than at Jerusalem. Some scholars disagree and suggest that *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* are Gnostics. Scholars who propose that Paul refers to Gnostics in 2 Corinthians can be defined more specifically as Jewish Gnostics, Jewish Christian Gnostics, Christian Gnostics, and Gnostics without Jewish or Christian teachings. The most important thing to take away from the previous scholarship is that there is no consensus on the group whom Paul calls *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*.

I will not enter the debate on whether *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* are historical groups identified with Gnostics or Jewish Christian communities. The scope of this paper is not to prove or disprove the precise historical group about whom Paul warns his community at Corinth, the scholars who fall on the different sides of this debate have presented their



arguments. Instead the scope of this paper is to consider Paul's ambiguity as a means allowing any teaching or teacher who disagrees with him thus allowing for any of the previous suggestions on the historical group in addition to allowing other groups not yet identified.

Now that the debate regarding *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* is summarized it is necessary to understand the context of Paul's text. In order to understand Paul's text a brief synopsis of the background of the Corinthian Correspondence, letter writing, and rhetoric are crucial. By studying the historical conventions of rhetoric and letter writing, the reader is able to interpret Paul's ambiguous yet contemptuous language in addressing his opponents and argument.

## Chapter 3

### Background on the Corinthian Correspondence

A study of the background of the Corinthian correspondence provides context for Paul's use of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. By studying the city of Corinth one can surmise what obstacles or challenges Paul faced in leading his Corinthian community. Some scholars, such as Roetzel and Barrett suggest that Paul's tone shifts so drastically as to provide evidence for a composite letter.<sup>49</sup> Finally, a study of the typical letter writing conventions of the time provides the epistolary context of Paul's world. Combining all aspects of Paul's world affords a better understanding of his use of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*.

#### 3.1 Social, Political, and Religious Environment

Corinth was a prominent urban center in the ancient Mediterranean world, and its location along with important isthmian trade allowed Corinth to prosper. Although Corinth had largely been destroyed by the Romans under Lucius Mummius in the second century BCE, the city flourished again under the Romans after Julius Caesar re-founded Corinth as a colony for Roman veterans in 44 BCE.<sup>50</sup> Both the wealth of renewed commercial activity and Corinth's status as a veteran colony allowed for upward mobility, financial opportunities, and a pluralistic society where multiple religious beliefs

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<sup>49</sup> Calvin Roetzel, *The Letters of Paul and Barrett, Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*

<sup>50</sup> Paul J Achtemeier, Marianne Meye Thompson and Joel B Gree, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2001), 329

and practices flourished.<sup>51</sup> The lifestyle in Corinth, with its easy access to wealth and its religious diversity may have offered many temptations to the Christians living in Corinth. Paul addresses his concerns regarding the temptations of Corinth in his Corinthian correspondence by both emphatically admonishing and encouraging his audience. After the brief overview of the physical location and the Corinthian culture now a review of the history behind the Corinthian correspondence ensures that the full context of Paul's text is understood.

### 3.2 Text-Critical

Some scholars have proposed that the letter usually named "2 Corinthians" is a composite text, consisting of several epistles that were later combined into one. Roetzel argues that 2 Corinthians consists of five distinct letters, and that the order of these letters may originally have been different than that preserved in the New Testament text.<sup>52</sup> Barrett summarizes the work of several previous scholars who have argued that chapters 10-13 were composed at a later date than the previous section<sup>53</sup>. Barrett disagrees with scholarship that presents 2 Corinthians in a completely different order than presented, suggesting instead that 2 Corinthians is a two-letter composition, "a simple partition of the epistle between i-ix and x-xiii."<sup>54</sup> Although there is some disagreement about

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<sup>51</sup> Achtemeier, Green, and Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology*, 329

<sup>52</sup> Calvin Roetzel, *The Letters of Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009) - the order of 2 Corinthians is as follows: 2 Cor 8, 2 Cor 2:14-7:4 (minus 6:14-7:1), 2 Cor 10:1-13:10, 2 Cor 1:1-2:13; 7:5-16; 13:11-13, 2 Cor 9.

<sup>53</sup> Barrett, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 14

<sup>54</sup> Barrett, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 21

whether or not the previous section includes all of chapters 1-9 or if it comprises only 2 Corinthians 8, sections of 2 Corinthians 2:14-7:4 Barrett argues that a previous letter had already been sent to the congregation at Corinth when the subsequent section was composed. This theory would account for the shift in tone between the earlier part of the letter and the more aggressive polemic in the later sections, where Paul addresses *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. The change in tone allows for the plausibility that 2 Corinthians is a composite. Whether or not the theory of the composite letter, as presented by Roetzel and Barrett, is true, the composite nature of the letter is not the only reason Paul would write in such a polemic tone.

## Chapter 4

### Letter Writing Context

In order to understand Paul's epistles to the Corinthians, it is vital to examine the role letter writing played in the ancient world. In the Greco-Roman cultural world, letter writing was a part of the secondary stage of education. Bruce proposes that the techniques Paul uses within his letters were techniques "of the common stock of educated people in the Hellenistic world at that time, whether they were Jews or Gentiles."<sup>55</sup> Forbes agrees with Bruce's position that Paul's education may not have included formal upper level Greek education.<sup>56</sup> While scholars debate what type of education Paul received, certainly Paul's letters are modeled on the Greco-Roman epistolary tradition. Correction, advice, encouragement, and replacement for Paul's personal presence – these purposes Paul accomplished through combining several forms of letter composition.

#### 4.1 Categories of Letters

Stowers explains that classifying letters is a complex task and while there are several qualities to consider in general, the classification of ancient speeches and letters is based on rhetorical classification: judicial, deliberative, and epideictic. He suggests there are more characteristics to consider such as the relationship between the author and

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<sup>55</sup> F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, 2nd Edition (Galilee: Doubleday, 1983), 238

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Forbes, "Ancient Rhetoric and Ancient Letters," in *Paul and Rhetoric* ed. J. Paul Sampley and Peter Lampe (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010) 143-160, 146

the recipient and the social occasion. Stowers categorizes letters of the Greco-Roman world into five groups: letters of friendship, family letters, letters of praise, letters of exhortation, letters of mediation, and the last category is letters of accusing, apologetic, and accounting<sup>57</sup>. The most appropriate categories for 2 Corinthians would include letters of friendship, family letters, letters of praise, and letters of exhortation.

Philosophers used letters to reiterate teachings to those they mentored.<sup>58</sup> Paul follows in the tradition of ancient philosophers as far back as Aristotle.<sup>59</sup> Paul may be categorized as a philosophical guide, or at least a guide and model of how to live according to the new gospel. However, Stowers proposes that Paul did not follow these traditions absolutely: “Paul’s focus is not on individual character but on building communities.”<sup>60</sup> Letters to communities were unusual for Paul and his contemporaries, Forbes suggests merely five percent, of those he studied, were addressed to multiple addressees.<sup>61</sup>

## 4.2 Relationships in Paul’s Letters

Paul works within the confines of the culture to which he was accustomed but does not avoid unconventional means. The majority of Paul’s letters address relationships – relationships with one another, relationships between the audience and Paul and other teachers, and relationships between the audience and God. Although the

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<sup>57</sup> Stanley Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986).

<sup>58</sup> Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 37

<sup>59</sup> Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 37

<sup>60</sup> Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 42

<sup>61</sup> Forbes, “Ancient Rhetoric and Ancient Letters,” 157

ancient norm would suggest that Paul would write with the friendly letter format, Paul actually implements a familial letter style.<sup>62</sup> Paul writes as if he is a father admonishing, advising, and encouraging his children. Coupling Paul's paternal language with his use of all three rhetorical classifications – deliberative, judicial, and epideictic – he creates rather ambiguous letters, making them difficult to categorize. Paul even includes elements other than Greco-Roman epistolary tradition such as writing as a Hebrew prophet and leader, leaving scholars with no consensus on categorization.

The significance of Paul's use of paternal terms outside of 2 Corinthians provides insight into Paul's framework for his juxtaposition with his opponents. In 2 Corinthians 12:14-15 Paul explains that his purpose is not to burden the Corinthians but to participate in a relationship just as fathers and children do – parents preparing for their children not the reverse. Within this discussion Paul conveys his great affection for them. Paul views the community at Corinth “as a chaste virgin to Christ” whose virtue is to be protected by the father (Paul).<sup>63</sup> Barrett suggests that Paul “suffered for the Corinthians the agony of a father.”<sup>64</sup> Paul writes to his communities as a father, chastising them when needed and encouraging them when needed.

Paul does not restrict himself to merely one type of relationship with his communities. Paul, as a Hellenized Jew, was influenced by the Greco-Roman world in addition to his Jewish background. Bruce reveals that “aside from purely religious thought Jewish traditions made a permanent impression on Christian letters in the use of

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<sup>62</sup> Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, 43

<sup>63</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:2

<sup>64</sup> Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 35

Old Testament language, prayers, thanksgivings, and blessings.’<sup>65</sup> Not only does Paul write to his audience as the leader of a community, friend, and concerned father but he also writes to his audience in the tradition of a Hebrew prophet, non-predictive prophecy. Note the transition to the Jewish prophetic voice in his next verse on repentance.

<sup>8</sup>For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it (though I did regret it, for I see that I grieved you with that letter, though only briefly). <sup>9</sup>Now I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance; (2 Corinthians 7:8-9)

Scholars have identified a pattern applicable to the Hebrew Prophets and their prophecies. Scott Duvall and Daniel Hays<sup>66</sup> provide one pattern and Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart<sup>67</sup> present another pattern although the two are very similar. The essential message is that the community is in a covenant with God and the prophet’s message is that the community has broken the covenant by committing an infraction. The prophet admonishes the community and reminds the community of curses for continuing without correction or promises for changing their course of action.<sup>68</sup>

We can see that Paul’s structure and treatment of his argument and audience is similar to this. Paul is not predicting; rather he is proclaiming, just as Hebrew Prophets did, that the Corinthians repent and make amends for the infraction; yet, like the Prophets he also has a hopeful, caring tone. This connection to the Hebrew prophecy tradition and its authority Paul employs through his prophetic language adds severity to the rebuke and yet a pastoral assurance to the Corinthians’ restoration after they had accepted *ὑπερλίαν*

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<sup>65</sup> Bruce, *New Testament History*, 238

<sup>66</sup> Scott Duvall and Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

<sup>67</sup> Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

<sup>68</sup> Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*; Fee, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*



*ἀπόστολοι* and their message. The rhetorical device further supports the composite letter definition Roetzel's theory proposes.

Analyzing Paul's unique style of letter comprised of elements of Greco-Roman epistolary, Hebrew Prophetic tradition, community, leadership, and friend and familial tone reveals the rhetorical environment in which he thinks and writes. Understanding that framework, consequently, reveals more about *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*.

## Chapter 5

### Rhetorical Context

Scholars agree that Paul employs rhetorical convention in his epistles; thus, the study of rhetoric is important to understanding Paul's context and provides more information on ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι and Paul's disagreement with them. Kennedy argues that Paul, whether or not classically trained in rhetoric, was exposed to it because all aspects of culture in the classical world were infused with rhetoric.<sup>69</sup> The extent of Paul's knowledge and intentional employment of rhetorical convention is not definitive; however, comparing Paul's rhetoric with Aristotle's treatise on rhetoric and other rhetorical convention provides evidence that Paul did possess overall knowledge and typically employs classical rhetoric in his letters.

Modern scholars provide several interpretations on Paul's employment of rhetoric. Given contends that Paul employs "the more controversial weapons of true rhetoric: ambiguity, cunning, and deception."<sup>70</sup> After expanding the types of sources for study, Mitchell states these two conclusions as significant: Paul utilizes rhetoric to portray a double-layered technique regarding who is worthy of imitation and he presents a meaningful alternative to the convention of boasting. Sampley concludes that Paul effectively applies what Cicero prescribed as goodwill, employing rhetoric to strengthen his own argument while discrediting his opponents and their argument.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, 10

<sup>70</sup> Mark D. Given, *Paul's True Rhetoric: Ambiguity, Cunning, and Deception in Greece and Rome* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 24

<sup>71</sup> J. Paul Sampley and Peter Lampe, *Paul & Rhetoric*, ed. J. Paul Sampley and Peter Lampe (New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

## 5.1 Classification of Speech

Aristotle classifies speeches into three categories: forensic, deliberative, and epideictic. Each classification of speech contains specific criteria that render its designation, such as the goal of the speech. Forensic defends or accuses, deliberative persuades, and epideictic praises in a ceremonial tone. Paul incorporates several aspects from each classification in 2 Corinthians, thus creating a composition with a debatable classification.

The first of the three categories of rhetorical composition is forensic which Paul uses to focus on specific transgression along with its injuries and compensation according to the law and unwritten principles.<sup>72</sup> Aristotle explains that because forensic speech focuses on a transgression or injuries that the past is the main concern of forensic speeches which Paul does. Epideictic speech is a ceremonial speech concerned with the virtues and vices of a particular person with the overall purpose to present an encomium or invective. The person remains the focus of the speech concentrating on the present. Deliberative speech concentrates on persuading the audience to a particular course of action and thus most often occurs within the context of lawmaking. Because the focus of deliberative speech is on choosing a course of action, the orator must provide the benefits, and with it the definition of what is “good.” Since overall admonishment and exhortation typify the deliberative speech the focus is on the future.

Paul utilizes several aspects of each classification and so his compositions are not definitively defined by one specific category. Paul accuses his opponents in 2 Corinthians of injurious slander and defends his own apostolic authority, which could

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<sup>72</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Robert (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004), Book I, Chapter 10

provide support for a forensic classification. Kennedy asserts Paul's purpose is to provide an apology.<sup>73</sup> He addresses four complaints: he was criticized for soft speech in person but boldness in his letters (2 Corinthians 10:1), untrained in speech (2 Corinthians 11:6), not charging the Corinthians for his teaching (2 Corinthians 11:7-9), and accusations of employing deception (2 Corinthians 12:6). This accusatory and defensive focus land the piece solidly in the forensics category. However there is more to 2 Corinthians than Paul's defense. Paul defends himself within the overall context of admonishing and encouraging his audience to reconsider the validity, authority, and character of the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* and their message. He presents the benefit of choosing the prescribed course of action: a right relationship with God and by following Paul's teachings so that life may go well for them. Paul composes a letter of admonishment and encouragement promoting the course of action of discerning and rejecting the nefarious message of the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. Thus, overall 2 Corinthians is also deliberative. He discusses only slightly the virtues and vices, instead focusing on the generosity of the Macedonian community in the collection for the church at Jerusalem, focusing on their suffering as a virtue, and focusing with great emphasis on reconciliation. Though small in proportion to the other two categories found in the small sample of 2 Corinthians, the promising, foreshadowing tone is clearly indicative of Epideictic speech.

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<sup>73</sup> Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, 93

## 5.2 Invention and Ambiguity of Rhetoric

Aristotle advises clear and appropriate language to aid in one's argument. He encourages the use of current language and the avoidance of invented words.<sup>74</sup> Paul breaks from these guidelines of rhetorical convention specifically in his discussion of the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. He employs ambiguous language and invents a word to label the opponents he relegated into one group. Lampe reveals, "Paul coined . . . the adverb *ὑπερλίαν* ('super') for the first time in the Greek language by merging *ὑπέρ* ('over') and *λίαν* ('very much')." <sup>75</sup> Lampe explains that Paul's invention is indicative of his tone suggesting that Paul views the situation as one he must win and thus promotes the course of action of eradicating *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. Paul breaks rhetorical convention twice first by inventing a word and secondly by drawing attention to his opponents. Leaving opponents unnamed is a rhetorical convention because naming an opponent would provide them with status.<sup>76</sup> Although Paul does not specifically name his opponents he does draw attention to them – though with sarcasm and ambiguity. The ambiguity allows the identification of the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* to be much broader, essentially encompassing anyone who presents a different teaching.

Given proposes that Paul was intentionally cunning, ambiguous, and deceitful, just as the Sophists were because he knew he did not meet the typical classical standards of rhetoric.<sup>77</sup> Paul's purpose for ambiguity, according to Given who builds on the work

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<sup>74</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book III, Chapter 2

<sup>75</sup> Lampe, "Can Words be Violent Or Do They Only Sound That Way?" in J. Paul Sampley and Peter Lampe, *Paul & Rhetoric*, ed. J. Paul Sampley and Peter Lampe (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 223-240, 227

<sup>76</sup> Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 48-49

<sup>77</sup> Given, "Paul and Rhetoric: A Sophos in the Kingdom of God," 178

of Shadi Bartsch, would be to provide multiple messages to multiple audiences.<sup>78</sup> Paul positions himself just as ancient Sophists – in a superior position in regards to wisdom. Paul’s self-proclaimed wisdom originates from God, in direct conflict with worldly wisdom.<sup>79</sup> He could then use his authority to “transfer them [his audience] from murky and ultimately deadly waters to living salvific waters where they may see their former habitat for what it was.”<sup>80</sup> Ultimately, Paul uses invention and ambiguity to present his authority, provide different messages to different audiences, and expose the danger of the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* and their message.

### 5.3 Goodwill in Rhetoric

Sampley argues that Paul uses a device found in Cicero’s works, *benevolentia*, to strengthen his argument while simultaneously discrediting his opponent’s argument.<sup>81</sup> Garnering goodwill (*benevolentia*), the orator must not only show concern and engage appropriately with his audience but also employ humility and engage appropriately with his opponent(s).

According to Sampley, Paul excels when trying to gain goodwill with reference to himself. Although he boasts (which one must do “without arrogance”), he does so only because he is forced to do so.<sup>82</sup> Paul’s discussion on his character is centered on his reasons for boasting. Paul enumerates the reasons he boasts – because, one, God is at

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<sup>78</sup> Given, *Paul’s True Rhetoric*, 22

<sup>79</sup> Given, *Paul’s True Rhetoric*, 96

<sup>80</sup> Given, *Paul’s True Rhetoric*, 176

<sup>81</sup> Sampley, “Paul, His Opponents in 2 Corinthians 10-13, and the Rhetorical Handbook,” 163

<sup>82</sup> Sampley, “Paul, His Opponents in 2 Corinthians 10-13, and the Rhetorical Handbook,” 164

work in him to no credit of his own, and two, because that dependence on God is why he is so strong, and three, because his history with the Corinthians serves his recommendation. Paul, however, implicitly acknowledges his character by the juxtaposition of himself and the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. Mitchell analyzes the term Paul employs in his discussion on boasting: “The Greek is *καυχᾶσθαι*, and is not common in Greek literature, nor throughout the New Testament, where it is confined to Paul, who uses the verb and nominal cognates frequently.”<sup>83</sup> Mitchell explains that in the Greco-Roman world the convention of boasting was not an emphasis on praising oneself but instead the emphasis was to be on the praise of others.<sup>84</sup> Paul uses the convention of boasting in the comparison of himself and *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. Although, Paul may be using an unconventional, invented, word that would draw disapproval from Aristotle, Paul employs rhetorical convention here not only in providing a general appeal to character but also as an example for what the audience should strive. Paul provides himself as an example of positive imitation and provides the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* as an example not to imitate.

Aristotle suggests that the character of the orator is essential to eliciting the desired outcome.<sup>85</sup> Paul employs the rhetorical device of imitation in a double-layered technique – Paul presents both positive and negative examples for the audience to consider including providing himself as a positive example and appeal to the moral character of the orator, which is always a part of the proof whether explicitly or implicitly

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<sup>83</sup> Margaret Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1991), 91

<sup>84</sup> Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 91

<sup>85</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book II, Chapter 1

acknowledged.<sup>86</sup> Paul not only uses himself as an example to be imitated but his language in 2 Corinthians is that of a father to his children thus creating not only goodwill but also an emotional and logical appeal to his character at the same time. The language Paul uses to label the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* and by providing himself as an example to imitate, Paul also provides the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* as something not to imitate thus garnering ill-will toward his opponents while garnering his own goodwill.

Sampley explains that Paul garners goodwill by addressing the situation or act in one of three ways each of which Paul uses effectively: denial, admitting but providing an explanation, or claiming a different act – redirection.<sup>87</sup> When Paul denies the accusations it is most often when it refers to deceit, his finances, and the differences he has in person versus in his letters.<sup>88</sup> However, Paul’s “admission of partial truth” occurs when he addresses his “lack of skill in speaking and his weaknesses – the Corinthians should not confuse that weakness with a lack of knowledge.”<sup>89</sup>

Within this context Paul’s use of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* serves two purposes. One purpose is to make his audience “ill-disposed” towards his opponents and other is, of course, to make them “well-disposed” to him. He does this, partly, by evoking pathos. Paul magnifies the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* to the Corinthians while minimizing his own human qualities. Furthermore he appeals to ethos in two ways: he uses paternal language, being protective and emotional concerning these opponents; and he uses familial language, focusing on their shared experiences and relationship. He refreshes the

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<sup>86</sup> Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 45-46

<sup>87</sup> Sampley, “Paul, His Opponents in 2 Corinthians 10-13, and the Rhetorical Handbook,” 165

<sup>88</sup> Sampley, “His Opponents in 2 Corinthians 10-13, and the Rhetorical Handbook,” 165-166

<sup>89</sup> Sampley, “His Opponents in 2 Corinthians 10-13, and the Rhetorical Handbook,” 166



Corinthians' memories by reminding them of his previous visits, reminding them of his own apostolic authority, and the wondrous signs that were performed before the Corinthians. "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with the utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works."<sup>90</sup> Thus by reminding his audience of the miracles and citing the audience as witnesses, Paul incorporates external proof, as clarified by Kennedy, into his composition of 2 Corinthians.

Paul modifies rhetorical convention in his treatment of his audience; the rhetorical convention would be to reference the acts of the audience "acts which have been performed with courage, wisdom, and mercy, but no as not to show excessive flatter."<sup>91</sup> Sampley explains that Paul does not follow this guideline because his audience and his opponents overlap, and because Paul's goal is not an acquittal or conviction of an individual but "for Paul the ultimate goal is that the gospel function as fully as possible in the lives of the readers."<sup>92</sup> Kennedy furthers rhetorical conventional categories by adding two more categories referencing the different nature of Paul's goals and goals of Greco-Roman rhetorical guides.<sup>93</sup>

If because Paul's opponents and audience overlap, as Sampley suggests, and because Paul exhorts his audience, I propose that *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* is non-specific so that no one in the Corinthian community is offended, but instead admonished lovingly while at the same time *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* are exposed. This is an example of Given's

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<sup>90</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:12

<sup>91</sup> Sampley, "Paul, His Opponents in 2 Corinthians 10-13, and the Rhetorical Handbook," 171

<sup>92</sup> Sampley, "Paul, His Opponents in 2 Corinthians 10-13, and the Rhetorical Handbook," 172

<sup>93</sup> Kennedy proposes rational and radial – one worldly and one "basically sacred" – *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, 93

study of Paul's ambiguity – wanting to address two audiences providing different information to each while protecting himself.<sup>94</sup> Although it is unclear whether or not the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* were members of the Corinthian community, it appears pretty clear that they were within the community and were well on their way to acceptance. Paul then employs ambiguity intentionally for a beneficial outcome. Considering Barrett's suggestion that *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* is a group entirely different from the Corinthians does not change this conclusion. Paul would still be desirous of the Corinthian realization of the danger of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* even if they were separate groups.

Paul's discourse of alterity, Paul's ambiguity in regards to *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* and his focus on the dissimilar message, allows for a universal and general quality to his letter and allows for the transference of focus onto the real issue at hand, that is the disparate messages – the separate Jesus, gospel, and spirit. Thus, not naming the opponents and defining them as anyone who teaches a gospel, Christ, or a spirit separate from Paul's message allows for application to any opponent. Paul's letters were read aloud in the community and meant to be disseminated. Omitting the names of the opponents restricts any preconceived notions that an audience may have based on the name and reputation of the opponents and limits their status. Reading 2 Corinthians and the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* in this manner allows for the argument of the disparate messages to be the focus of the reading. A secondary focus is the danger of allowing such "others" into the community. The focus ceases to be on the individuals or the group of opposition. The audience will not be sidetracked or influenced by the names, whether positively or negatively.

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<sup>94</sup> Given, *Paul's True Rhetoric*, 26-27

The rhetorical tradition is prevalent throughout Paul's writings but he does not strictly adhere to the rhetorical conventions when in conflict with his message and his goal. Scholars agree that rhetoric played an important role in Pauline epistolary. Although some scholars disagree about how formal and extensive Paul's Greek education was, Paul at least possessed a minimal knowledge of rhetorical devices and employed them in his letters. Paul utilizes characteristics of epideictic, forensic, and deliberative classifications of rhetoric but overall 2 Corinthians is a deliberative composition. Paul addresses virtues and vices sparingly; he addresses past injuries and critiques of his character and authority by *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*, as quite a bit of 2 Corinthians is devoted to his defense. However, Paul focuses more on admonishing his audience to disregard *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* and their specious argument.

Paul utilizes rhetoric to establish his authority over the Corinthian community while at the same time presenting *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* as subordinate. He, actually, establishes his own authority vis-à-vis *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. He utilizes rhetorical convention when it benefits his message and avoids it when it does not benefit his message. He positions himself as someone with knowledge that *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* do not possess. This knowledge benefits the Corinthian community – garnering goodwill while undermining the authority and credibility of one's opponents.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Reasons for Writing the Corinthian Correspondence**

Several circumstances prompted Paul's response to the Corinthians. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians because he had heard from several sources that the Corinthian community suffered from disunity. Paul also references the letter the Corinthians sent him in 1 Corinthians 7. Paul reprimands the Corinthians for their inappropriate behavior and advises the Corinthians of appropriate behavior. Paul's main concern for 1 Corinthians is unity and acceptance of one another.

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians for a number of reasons; thus 2 Corinthians is a combination of many types of letters, as Mitchell states, "it seems to mix exhortation, advice, rebuke, invective, and apology."<sup>95</sup> Paul uses all genres of rhetorical convention to address the Corinthians in their current situation. As is typical of Pauline letters, 2 Corinthians contains the salutation and praise and thanksgivings to his audience, the Corinthians.

A brief summary of 2 Corinthians: Paul writes to the Corinthian church regarding a collection for the church in Jerusalem, Paul's altered plans for visiting the Corinthians, Paul's ministry (Paul as a leader in the ministry, the ministry consists of afflictions, and the reconciliation of the ministry – reconciliation to God), and Paul's defense of his own apostolic authority and warnings of false teachers. False teachers had entered into the church community of Corinth and in doing so created disunity in the church, mistrust of Paul and disregard for the gospel that Paul taught. Paul's letters to the Corinthians

suggest that the congregation in Corinth was plagued by divisiveness and internal conflict.

Paul writes his letter to the Corinthians fusing three modes of epistolary writing. Paul writes as a concerned father to his children employing the use of friendly and family letters of the Greco-Roman world. Paul writes as a teacher and a mentor using the Greek philosophic tradition. Paul also writes as a superior insisting on a certain authority that is consistent with the Greco-Roman societal norms of hierarchy. Mitchell explains that Paul's purpose for writing 2 Corinthians was to defend himself against the accusations of the opponents – weakness in personality but afterwards moves to another argument, “he seeks to accomplish textually what he was so embarrassingly unable to do in person: to bring the Corinthians to repentance of their disloyalty and a return to obedience.”<sup>96</sup> Paul's own words support this analysis, that Paul was indeed defending not only his apostolic authority but also his personality but that there is an underlying reason, Paul wants the Corinthians to see their misguided allegiance to the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. In order for Paul to accomplish this, he must garner goodwill toward himself, gently admonish the Corinthians, and garner ill will towards the opponents. Paul utilizes rhetorical convention to complete his task.

The divisiveness and disunity of the Corinthian community, Paul's reassertion of his authority, and his treatment of the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* provides evidence that Paul's concern for the Corinthian community was induced not only by the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* but especially their message. Paul admonishes the Corinthians to reconsider their

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<sup>96</sup> Mitchell, “The Birth of Pauline Hermeneutics” in *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict: Essays in Honour of Margaret Thrall*. (Leiden: Brill; 2003), 17-54, 32

acceptance of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* and their message. He reminds the Corinthians of his authority through signs and wonders, using the Corinthians as witness rather than a third party. Through the defense of his authority, revelation of his superior wisdom, and reminding the Corinthians of their witness as proof, Paul juxtaposes himself in direct opposition with *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. Paul's treatment of the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* in the context of the overall correspondence allows for the interpretation of this group as "other" thus a study on Paul's treatment of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* and opponents outside of 2 Corinthians is necessary.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Paul and His Opponents**

#### **7.1 Paul and His Opponents (especially in Philippians and Galatians)**

A study of Paul's opponents in general and specifically is beneficial to the current study. When one studies Paul's treatment of his opponents overall and within a specific letter, then the reader notices whether Paul treats all of his opponents equally or if there is an anomaly. Overall Paul treats his opponents in much the same fashion; however, in 2 Corinthians there are some differences. Furnish provides an explanation on Paul's opponents in general. He continues Roetzel's work of Paul's classification of his communities and others, 'insiders' and 'outsiders,' and identifies places other than 1 Thessalonians for examples. Furnish provides four categories of opponents:

1. Christians who belonged to churches other than those he himself had founded
2. Paul's Christian opponents, some of Jewish and other of Gentile background.
3. Non-Christian adversaries, people who were not just hostile to Paul's mission specifically, but to Christianity in general. Such hostility came from both Jews and Gentiles.
4. Non-Christians in general – again, both Jews and Gentiles. In this case, three sub-groups may be identified: Jews who were not part of the 'remnant' of Israel who had believed; Gentiles who had heard Paul's gospel but remained indifferent to it; Gentiles who had not heard the gospel.<sup>97</sup>

Although Furnish states that his study of 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians is insufficient to provide overall broad application of his hypotheses however given the scope of his scholarship and the scope of this paper, they are in fact applicable. He suggests that Paul clearly marks the line between insider and outsider and they live in different realms. Furnish further explains that Paul's appeal is for the insiders to remain

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<sup>97</sup> Furnish, "Inside Looking Out: Some Pauline Views of the Unbelieving Public" in *Pauline Conversations in Context: Essays in Honor of Calvin J. Roetzel* ed. Janice C. Anderson, Philip Sellev, and Claudia Setzer (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) 104-124, 105

cordial with outsiders. Remaining cordial with the outsiders is in direct opposition to what Lampe suggests is Paul's goal – complete eradication of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*, ostracize the outsiders. Lampe proposes that Paul's tone is indicative of his contempt for *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. He suggests that, "his conflict with them was not about compromising and integrating, it was about expelling, about winning, or losing."<sup>98</sup> Lampe reiterates that Paul's invectives against the intruders in Corinth attempted to function as powerful and violent act of shaming, that is, of ostracizing, and socially excluding. Lampe likens it to an *exorcism*.<sup>99</sup> Although Lampe is concerned specifically with 2 Corinthians and Furnish is concerned with letters with other than 2 Corinthians this paper benefits from both scholars. In regards to *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* of 2 Corinthians they could be considered "outsiders". Although *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* could be "outsiders" these opponents are not innocuous outsiders, these are dangerous outsiders preaching a different message that Paul fears will lead the Corinthians astray, thus Paul's emotional and derisive reaction.

Paul addresses his opponents in 2 Corinthians much more sarcastically and derisively in comparison to his other correspondences. Paul's sarcastic use of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* and his contemptuous language in regards to the opponents of 2 Corinthians allows for the alternative view that Paul's discussion of his opponents in 2 Corinthians is an exercise on the discourse of alterity. Paul's contemptuous language indicates Paul's genuine concern of the danger the different message presented to the Corinthian congregation. Paul's rhetorical use of the ambiguous term *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* and the

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<sup>98</sup> Lampe, "Can Words be Violent Or Do They Only Sound That Way?" 223

<sup>99</sup> Lampe, "Can Words be Violent Or Do They Only Sound That Way?" 223



other teaching, other Christ, other gospel, and other Spirit, allow for the view that Paul's discourse is really a matter of "otherness."

The same nonspecific "otherness" found in 2 Corinthians is not applicable to Philippians and Galatians. Schmithals is one of a few scholars who argue that the opponents in Galatia and Philippi were Gnostics however; the majority of scholars argue instead that the opponents were Jewish Christians. In Philippians and Galatians, Paul addresses Jewish Christians who promote circumcision as an act that was acceptable and appropriate throughout the history of the Hebrews. "Non-Israelites who sought to share in Israel's destiny as God's chosen people through Jesus would circumcise because that is what God commanded of such people."<sup>100</sup> Out of this belief, groups who promote circumcision and adherence to the law as a means of righteousness instead of faith in Christ as Paul promotes come into direct conflict with Paul. In both Galatians and Philippians Paul cautions the audience against teachers with insincere motives.

Paul warns against those perverting the gospel in Philippians 1:15-17. Not only does Paul caution that some teachers are preaching out of their own desires and not love Paul reveals that it does not matter because in the end Christ is preached. Paul's declaration of Christ preached in spite of bad intentions is significant when compared to 2 Corinthians because Paul ignores any positive outcome in 2 Corinthians and instead writes that he worries about the Corinthians being led astray from their "sincere and pure devotion" just as Eve was deceived.<sup>101</sup> Presumably, the intentions of the opponents of Philippians are not as important as the message that they preach. The message must not

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<sup>100</sup> Personal communication with Dr. Chris Seeman, April 2, 2013

<sup>101</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:3

be so dissimilar thus Paul can see a positive outcome – Christ is still taught. This same positive outcome is not the same in 2 Corinthians – Paul does not allow for a positive outcome instead Paul attacks not only the messenger but the message, too. The logical conclusion is that the message in 2 Corinthians, unlike the message in Philippians, is antithetical to Paul’s message. In Galatians and Philippians the opponents may be somewhat sincere in their preaching but are still interested in their own ambitions while in 2 Corinthians the opponents are absolutely not apostles, they are another group entirely not concerned with anything but than their own ambition and status. There is no redeeming factor for *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* of 2 Corinthians, unlike the ambitious opponents in Galatians and Philippians. They may have some knowledge of the basics of Paul’s message and although are ambitious still have some redeemable qualities. Ambition alone is not worthy of condemnation, it is but one of many factors. On the other hand, *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* do not possess redeemable qualities, according to Paul. If they had any redeemable qualities, Paul would not respond in such a vitriolic manner, nor would he by means of his contemptuous invented language call for the eradication of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*.

Paul mentions in Galatians that he confronted Peter, a Jewish Christian and church leader, in Antioch because Peter was, as Paul says a hypocrite. Here Paul confronts Peter, one of the pillars of the Christian faith as Paul himself says in Galatians.<sup>102</sup> Paul’s account, if taken at face value and without the assumption that Paul minimized his reaction to Peter, is mild. Paul could very well have used the vitriolic derisive language that he uses for the opponents of 2 Corinthians. Paul specifically

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<sup>102</sup> Galatians 2:9 “and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars”

names the person who was led astray, Barnabas. Paul does not leave him unidentified, nor does he leave the one who led him astray unidentified. Peter was considered a leader of the time, yet Paul still identifies him. If Paul were concerned with leaving the apostles of the church at Jerusalem unnamed for fear of retaliation or offending them then this would be a place in which Paul would utilize that same ambiguity. Paul's approach, at least what he presents to the Galatians, is rather casual – granted Paul uses his confrontation with Peter to orient the audience in his discussion of his theology for Galatians, the law does not provide righteousness but Christ provides righteousness, the importance of the cross of Christ, culminating in the thought that otherwise Christ died for naught.

Paul addresses those who emphasize circumcision for Gentile believers, on several occasions in Philippians and Galatians. Paul's treatment of this group and opponents is mild in comparison to 2 Corinthians. Paul says that "false believers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy of the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us" (Galatians 4). Paul evokes deceit in his discussion of these opponents – secretly brought in, spying, enslave. Yet, he merely calls them false believers. The strongest language Paul uses outside of 2 Corinthians is in Galatians 5:12 and Philippians 3:2. "I wish those who unsettle you would castrate themselves" and "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh!" This language is indicative of Paul's sarcasm and the language is severe; Paul calls his opponents dogs, he says that they do evil, and yet the language is more controlled compared to 2 Corinthians. The difference between the language in both Galatians and Philippians and the language in 2 Corinthians is that Paul is not addressing the character of the person. Yes, calling a

person a dog, impugns that person's character but the message is not so specious as to warrant Paul's contemptuous language advising ostracizing the opponents. In Philippians and Galatians, Paul discusses an act of circumcision, and uses terminology appropriate to the topic. Although Paul addresses a topic, one he writes about often and has such feelings about as to facilitate this kind of language, the language is still mild in comparison to 2 Corinthians. Paul is sarcastic when he says that his opponents, the group that emphasizes circumcision as opposed to faith in Jesus, should castrate themselves; of course the action is unrealistic. Paul's language is emotional however; he is not calling for the eradication of his opponents in this instance.

Comparing the language Paul uses to address the opponents in 2 Corinthians with the language Paul uses in 1 Corinthians, Galatians, and Philippians proves fruitful. Paul's language is much more severe in 2 Corinthians. The reasons for the difference in language include who the audience is, that is either a Jewish or a Gentile Christian; what concerns Paul such as organization of meetings, acceptance of moral behavior, gifts or if the audience is in danger or accepting a completely different gospel, Spirit and Christ. The conclusion is that 2 Corinthians with Paul's perception of the danger that *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* pose affects Paul's language. Paul views *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* as dangerous to not only his authority, as some scholars suggest, but that he is concerned for the community at Corinth putting their trust in a group who does not deserve it and a message that provides no benefit.

## 7.2 Paul's Characterization of His Opponents in 2 Corinthians

Paul's treatment of the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* provides support for the interpretation that Paul relegates his opponents into a nonspecific that equates with "others." Paul, although leaving them unnamed, draws attention to the group by using an invented word and equates them with false apostles and deceitful workers and compares them with the serpent who deceived Eve and masquerading as servants of Christ but actually servants of Satan.<sup>103</sup> Paul explains that the message of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* is something separate, different, and even strange. The general nature of Paul's explication of their message indicates that what concerned Paul was the message at odds with his own. Although the message may be unspecified Paul adds a qualifier. He explained that the message was a different gospel, Christ, and Spirit from the one Paul taught and the Corinthians received and accepted<sup>104</sup> – something that was conflicting with what he taught.

Paul's treatment of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* is within the context of Paul's familial language and concern for the Corinthian community. Paul views the community at Corinth "as a chaste virgin to Christ" (11:2) whose virtue is to be protected by the father (Paul). Furthermore to reiterate Paul uses familial and emotional language in his letters. Paul employs paternal language when he addresses the Corinthian congregation, explicitly comparing himself to a parent. Paul points out to the Corinthians that the role of father is in fact a unique and rare role. This protective stance prepares the reader for the vitriol that follows in 2 Corinthians 11:3-6. In Chapter 11, Paul establishes the close

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<sup>103</sup> *ψευδαπόστολοι, ἐργάται δόλιοι, μετασχηματιζόμενοι εἰς ἀποστόλους Χριστοῦ· καὶ οὐ θαῦμα, αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ Σατανᾶς μετασχηματίζεται εἰς ἄγγελον φωτός*

<sup>104</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:4

relationship between himself and the Corinthians by using fatherly language and referring to the Corinthian community as a “bride.” He then suggests that danger, in the form of “the serpent [who] deceived Eve by its cunning” is looming, and he expresses concern about his child (the Corinthians) being led astray because others are preaching a different gospel, Jesus, and spirit. Thus within this familial framework, Paul presents his polemic response to the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*.

In 2 Corinthians Paul uses a variety of terms to characterize his opponents, and some of this language is definitely derisive. For example, Paul compares his opponents to the serpent who deceived Eve, labels them boasters, false apostles, deceitful workers, and compares them to Satan’s ministers.<sup>105</sup> Some may suggest that Paul is simply superficially inflating his contemptuous language here in context, however, Paul appears genuinely concerned for his audience, the Corinthians, and thus allows for his vitriol. That is not to say that Paul dismisses the rhetorical convention of garnering ill-will toward his opponents. It is important to examine the passages because they serve as a foil to Paul’s profile of himself. Paul’s first mention of those who oppose him comes in 2:27. The implication that the Corinthians have actually encountered preachers whose sincerity Paul impugns [is] confirmed in 5:12-13. The real point of contrast here is a matter of the heart, of intentions. Paul hopes to bring the Corinthians into a good relationship with God and to recognize the gospel of Christ; his opponents boast in themselves, being concerned not for the kingdom of God but for their own gain. Paul is warning his congregation about these people so that they are not deceived. If Paul can garner ill-will toward his opponents then that, according to Aristotle, Cicero and

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<sup>105</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:3, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

rhetorical convention, will adversely affect the credibility of the opponent and then by extension the message. Paul is not merely adhering to rhetorical convention because if he were then he would not invent a word to apply to his opponents. Thus, although he is attempting to discredit his opponents and thus assert his own authority, he is also breaking with convention in order to address the danger of his opponents, *τῶν ὑπερλίαν ἀποστόλων*.

Paul next discusses letters of recommendation (3:1ff). In the ancient world, letters were often sent from one person or group to another in order to attest either to their authority or the success of the one carrying the letter.<sup>106</sup> Barrett points out that the use of commendatory letters was widespread in antiquity. Although we do not know what Paul's opponents said, it is apparent from the arguments Paul makes that they possessed such a letter while Paul did not, and that they used this fact to discredit and question Paul's authority. Paul deflects their insinuation by naming the Corinthians' themselves as his credentials. Paul reminds the Corinthians that they are his recommendation since he founded their community.

Letters of recommendation are important, but they neither replace nor surpass Paul's authority, according to Paul. In effect, Paul tries to demonstrate that his letter of recommendation is from God, using the community at Corinth as his letter and for Paul this would only be possible through God. The contrast also implies that the opponents' letters are not from God, which renders suspect any claims they may make against Paul. Because they are not

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<sup>106</sup> Personal communication with Dr. Chris Seeman, April 2, 2013. Further examples can be seen in Acts and Romans. Acts 18:27 and Romans 16 in which Paul provides Phoebe with a letter of recommendation.

from God, they are susceptible to error and deception. Paul explicitly contrasts human with divine standards on three occasions in 2 Corinthians 10:2-5.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul addresses the intentions and the character of the opponents, they are deceitful, they are false apostles, they masquerade as apostles of Christ but they are servants of Satan. The language indicates that there is something more imperative than a slightly different understanding of circumcision, something more than whether or not one adheres to the Law of Moses rather than faith as the means of righteousness. Mitchell proposes that for Paul his worst fear with this group of opponents in 2 Corinthians is that Paul would receive more humiliation as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:20-21 not that they would go to “another Jesus (11:4).<sup>107</sup> Mitchell argues that if Paul’s true concern was worry over the Corinthians going to another Jesus that Paul would have provided more information on the differences of messages.<sup>108</sup> However, one crucial aspect of rhetoric, and an aspect that Paul utilizes often, is the appeal to the character of the speaker – the appeal to ethos. Presumably, Paul’s audience already knows what the message of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* is, so why reiterate it? If Paul’s audience did not know what the message was, there would be no purpose in presenting such a polemic response; there would be no reason to address it. Unless, Paul was speaking in generalized terms – cautioning his audience to be aware of anything that conflicted with what Paul taught. Or, perhaps more likely, there was a real message that was dissimilar to what Paul taught but Paul decided to be proactive and address all messages that conflicted with his teachings at once.

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<sup>107</sup> Mitchell, “The Birth of Pauline Hermeneutics,” 31

<sup>108</sup> Mitchell, “The Birth of Pauline Hermeneutics,” 31



Barrett argues that in verse 2, Paul is appealing to the Corinthians. He further argues that Paul references Christ and his meekness and anger – “it is better to be misunderstood in *meekness* than in anger, and Paul hopes that *boldness* will not become necessary, though he is prepared to use it, and is thinking of it, considering . . . it.”<sup>109</sup> Barrett argues that for Paul living and acting according to the flesh meant that one’s focus was only on matters of this earth but not a material focus. He further explains that the focus was on things apart from God, things that are fallen, “living anthropocentrically.”<sup>110</sup> Barrett explicates that the opponents must be living according to this manner, “relegating God to a subordinate place.”<sup>111</sup> He elucidates verse 3 arguing that to not wage war against human standards, “neither with self-centered motives, that is, to establish one’s own position and increase one’s own power, nor on the basis of one’s own resources.”<sup>112</sup> Paul addresses his character and the character of his opponents and the focus of the two. Paul’s focus on things of God not of the world would be appropriate for Paul but the opponents’ focus did not coincide and thus could sway his Corinthian community away from Paul’s teachings. This is a plausible contradictory message, an alteration of the focal point. Perhaps supported by the numerous references to God and his power over the power of humans and the emphasis on boasting not in human standards but on the standards of God. A focal point of centering oneself is a rather general argument yet allows for a different gospel but not necessarily a different Christ, or Spirit. Barrett’s conclusion may allow for one aspect of the differing messages. Barrett provides evidence that the focus of the opponents does in fact differ from that of

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<sup>109</sup> Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 249

<sup>110</sup> Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 170

<sup>111</sup> Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 249-250

<sup>112</sup> Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 250-251

Paul especially within the context of commendations and human versus spiritual standards.

Barrett argues that Paul does not have time to commend himself and that the commendation of oneself is really not Paul's focus. He further explains that Paul will not play the game with the opponents, stating that the standard to which the opponents are measuring themselves is actually no standard because it was their own standard. Barrett clarifies verse 12 with verse 13, providing evidence that indeed the standards of the opponents are their own standards and that Paul refuses to follow suit. "Since, when one measures himself by himself, it is hardly possible to achieve less than complete success, their boasting had had no measure or limit."<sup>113</sup> Barrett further explains that Paul's standard was the standard of Christ. Paul's apostolic authority came from Christ and God thus Paul was not boasting based not his own standards nor human standards but on divine standards. The rest of the verses explain Paul's thesis regarding standards and limits of boasting and in whom one should boast, the real standard of boasting is in one's weakness because as Paul proposes one should boast in Christ and in God and not in human standards and that when people are weak it allows for God through Christ to then be strong.

Although Paul and other believers live in the world they do not fight or live according to human standards but the standards of God, which are spiritual standards. Paul's instruction here is to remain firm in the knowledge of who God is – a spiritual and unchanging being. He also instructs his followers to be on alert for insinuation that God changes or that would put emphasis on this world. Paul counters his opponents by identifying their concern with worldly things. Hence, he is unwilling to waste time arguing and debating why what they say is incorrect – the

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<sup>113</sup> Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 262-263

Corinthians should already know. By their boasting of their own works, the works of others, and by comparing themselves with others in order to gain status, the opponents misunderstand the gospel Paul preaches – not boasting in things or abilities but boasting in God. The difference between Paul and his opponents is essentially varying opinions of what the gospel and what Christ crucified entails. Paul’s polemic response to *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* indicates that Paul views their message as contradictory to his own message and not just contradictory but dangerous to the Corinthians. Although we cannot know with certainty what message *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* taught, we can deduce that given Paul’s contemptuous language, the invention of words, the severe tone, the attempt to persuade the Corinthians to not only avoid but to dismiss *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* from their presence, and Paul’s overall acute response that *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* did not agree with Paul or at least Paul did not agree with them, otherwise there would be no reason to resort to such tactics. Taken a step further, if Paul’s opponents and Paul agreed with the message there would be no purpose in writing the letter. Paul’s employment of ambiguous language and avoidance of specifically identifying the dissimilar messages rather than stating the generalization of gospel, Jesus, and spirit different or separate from the one Paul taught is not indicative of cohesion and agreement. Barrett argues that the behavior of the false apostles was influenced by their belief of Christology.<sup>114</sup> Barrett further suggests that although Paul may have been offended and wounded his main concern was that the Corinthian church accepted teachings that were contrary to the message of Paul, “it had not yet discovered that Christ the church proclaims as Lord is Christ crucified, still crucified as the risen Lord, risen indeed in his wounds (cf. John xx.25-9); that Christians live by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. v. 7).”<sup>115</sup> Whether or not this particular form of Christology was the difference of opinion between Paul and *ὑπερλίαν*

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<sup>114</sup> Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 49

<sup>115</sup> Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 49

*ἀπόστολοι* what is important is that Paul and *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* were at odds in regards to their message. Barrett appropriately attributes Paul's response to his concern for the Corinthian community rather than some pretended offence that Paul received from *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* as Mitchell suggests by interpreting Paul's main concern in his interaction with the Corinthians was being humbled again.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul addresses the intentions and the character of the opponents, they are deceitful, they are false apostles, they masquerade as apostles of Christ but they are servants of Satan. The language indicates that there is something more imperative than a slightly different understanding of circumcision, something more than whether or not one adheres to the Law of Moses rather than faith as the means of righteousness. Mitchell proposes that for Paul his worst fear with this group of opponents in 2 Corinthians is that Paul would receive more humiliation as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:20-21 not that they would go to “another Jesus (11:4).<sup>116</sup> Mitchell argues that if Paul's true concern was worry over the Corinthians going to another Jesus that Paul would have provided more information on the differences of messages.<sup>117</sup> However, one crucial aspect of rhetoric, and an aspect that Paul utilizes often, is the appeal to the character of the speaker – the appeal to ethos. Presumably, Paul's audience already knows what the message of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* is, so why reiterate it? If Paul's audience did not know what the message was, there would be no purpose in presenting such a polemic response; there would be no reason to address it. Unless, Paul was speaking in generalized terms – cautioning his audience to be aware of anything that conflicting with what Paul taught. Or, perhaps more likely, there was a real message that was dissimilar to what Paul taught

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<sup>116</sup> Mitchell, “The Birth of Pauline Hermeneutics,” 31

<sup>117</sup> Mitchell, “The Birth of Pauline Hermeneutics,” 31

but Paul decided to be proactive and address all messages that conflicted with his teachings at once.

By comparing his opponents with the serpent, Paul characterizes them as cunning as well as deceptive. Once again, Paul emphasizes the theme of sincerity. Paul's earlier discussion of letters of recommendation suggests why he is genuinely concerned: because he fears his opponents' credentials will imbue them with sufficient influence to persuade the Corinthians to embrace "another Jesus...a different spirit...a different gospel."<sup>118</sup> It is of course possible that Paul is artificially inflating the differences between himself and his opponents in order to establish his own authority. The harshness of Paul's language, however, suggests a very real rivalry. Lampe elucidates the reasoning behind Paul's invective stating that *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* are so clearly outsiders and preach a message so opposite Paul's that the only way to treat them is without identification and with scorn. Although Paul had very real opposition in 2 Corinthians, we can still apply the interpretation that Paul executes his discussion of this very real opposition in general terms thus allowing for multiple interpretations of *τῶν ὑπερλίαν ἀποστόλων*. Paul created an ambiguous term, an invented term, a term that could very well have multiple meanings in his discussion of a group of people who taught a message that was different from his own teachings.

However, Mitchell warns readers not to assume that there was a sudden influx of "outsiders" who Paul addresses in 2 Corinthians but instead "what is certain from the evidence in Paul's letter is that other missionaries have 'rhetorically arrived,' in the sense that they have been invoked by a local Corinthian as the standard for apostolic authority,

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<sup>118</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:4

a comparison that set Paul's position and legitimacy in serious debate."<sup>119</sup> What Mitchell argues is similar to what Lampe proposes that Paul has indeed encountered people who are judging Paul based on his rhetorical ideals, that they are engaging in a debate of persuasion for the Corinthian community. Yet, these opponents are indeed outsiders, Furnish provides four categories, as presented above, to define the outsiders, but I contend that a more general definition is provided by Paul himself in his discussion of the opponents and *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* of 2 Corinthians – anyone who preaches a different gospel, a different Christ, and a different Spirit would be an outsider. They do not have the information that those in the inner circle have and thus are outside. These differences are the real attributes of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* and Paul's opposition, as Paul defines it. Thus, Paul is indeed providing a general discussion on "otherness."

This section of the text that culminates in Paul's assertion: "I think that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles"<sup>120</sup> is therefore, I believe, meant sarcastically here, and not as a compliment to these other apostles. When scholars suggest that *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* are members of the church at Jerusalem, especially the leaders, some assume that Paul's tone was not sarcastic and that it was a term of deep respect. Paul's emphasis on humility throughout the text indicates that being *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* is not a good thing.

And what I do I will also continue to do, in order to deny an opportunity to *those who want an opportunity to be recognized as our equals* in what they boast about.<sup>121</sup> (2 Corinthians 11:12)

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<sup>119</sup> Mitchell, "The Birth of Pauline Hermeneutics," 31

<sup>120</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:5

<sup>121</sup> Emphasis added

The *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* are not actually in the same rank or standing as Paul even if they claim to be; he is in fact their superior. They are merely pretenders. The *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* are the opposition to Paul’s teachings made concrete. They are a detriment to Paul’s church in Corinth. These opponents are the personification of the division in the community in Corinth.

Paul’s next comments regarding his opponents continue in this derisive vein. Paul explains more about these opponents in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15. I would argue that the identification of the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* with the false apostles and with Satan/the Serpent is discernible in the rhetorical structure, chiasmus, of the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of 2 Corinthians.

A	B	C	B1	A1
The Cunning Serpent who deceived Eve	Someone preaching another Christ/ Jesus, gospel, and Spirit	Paul vs. Super-Apostles	Boasters who are false apostles, deceitful workers	Satan disguises/ masquerades self as angel of light and so these ministers of Satan are disguised/ masquerades as ministers of Christ

Figure 1 Paul’s Chiasmus<sup>122</sup>

The reference to the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* is framed by the parallel references to the cunning serpent in 11:2 and the disguised Satan in 11:14, as well as the parallel references to false apostles in 11:4 and 11:13. This “symmetry of falsehood”, coupled with the hyperbolic characterization of these apostles as *ὑπερλίαν* in the midst of a textual

<sup>122</sup> Here are the verses for these terms: A (2 Corinthians 11:2), B (2 Corinthians 11:4), C (2 Corinthians 11:4-5), B (2 Corinthians 11:13), A (2 Corinthians 11:14-15)

discourse on humility and weakness, suggests that *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* are to be identified with the false apostles and the false serpent. A1 further clarifies A and B1 further clarifies B, and visa versa. Thus framing and revealing what is ultimately at stake and contrasts Paul and *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*. The chiasmus provides evidence that Paul consistently discusses the same group throughout. Scholars such as Käsemann, Bauer, and Barrett separate the *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* from the false apostles but allow for a possible indirect connection.<sup>123</sup> Other scholars, such as Lampe, Gorman to name a few agree that the false apostles are *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*.<sup>124</sup> Because boasters who are false apostles and deceitful workers equate with someone who preaches a separate gospel, Jesus, and spirit they are all considered “other.” Paul characterizes those who teach something other than what he teaches negatively comparing them with false apostles and deceitful workers. He defines who they are by what they do not by their specific historic identity. Thus, anyone who acts in this manner is *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*.

The sarcastic language that Paul employs in his use of the term *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* and his contemptuous language in discussing the character of those *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*, “false apostles,” and those who need letters of recommendation provide insight into Paul’s argument. Paul employs rhetorical convention by using hyperbolic language in reference to his opponents, he employ rhetorical convention by leaving his opponents unnamed, and he provides rhetorical convention by providing an example of “good” – someone to imitate, himself. The study of Paul’s language and the rhetorical devices he used and did not use illustrate his ability to persuade and dissuade his

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<sup>123</sup> Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*

<sup>124</sup> Gorman, Michael J. *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters*, and Peter Lampe “Can Words be Violent Or Do They Only Sound That Way?”



audience by appealing to character, logic, and the appeal of the message itself. The purpose Paul wrote to the Corinthians was two-fold; Paul was persuading, he was bolstering his apostolic authority while denouncing the opponents' lack of authority by using language as a vehicle to obtain this goal and dissuading his audience from allegiance to some "otherness." The conflicting messages was an integral element in Paul's discourse, in fact, it was the driving force of Paul's response to the Corinthians and the conflicting message along with the Corinthian acceptance and allegiance affected Paul's language.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in response to real opponents who were preaching a separate gospel, Christ, and spirit. Scholars are unable to definitively identify those opponents with a specific historic person or group. Previous attempts to specify a specific historic group with the opponents of 2 Corinthians Paul labeled, *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* includes several options provided in the discussion above. Scholars on all sides of the argument have provided well-defined explanations and defense for their conclusions previously summarized. Although the purpose of this paper is not to enter into this debate of the specific historic group Paul coined *τῶν ὑπερλίαν ἀποστόλων*, none of these groups seems to fully embody the group Paul addresses.

Although Paul may have had a rather strained relationship with the leadership of the church at Jerusalem, specifically Peter, James, and John it would seem unlikely that Paul would use such vitriolic language in addressing this group of men. The external evidence does not support this theory, nowhere else does Paul portray a desire to terminate a relationship with the leaders. Within the correspondence of Corinthians Paul asks, within close proximity of the discussion of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*, the Corinthians for a collection for the church at Jerusalem. If Paul were interested in terminating the relationship with the leadership at Jerusalem Paul would not ask for a collection to benefit the apostles at Jerusalem. If Paul were asking for a collection for the church at Jerusalem, Paul would not speak with such vitriol regarding the leadership of that church. As for the scholars who suggest that *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* represent a group of Gnostics,

there is no modern consensus on the “Gnostic movement.” What can be concluded is that Gnosticism was a movement with a wide variety of beliefs and the movement itself was so young and undeveloped that this label would be inappropriate.

Paul employs most of the standard rhetorical convention appealing to logic by using proofs. He appeals to ethos by promoting his own authority, knowledge, and affection for the audience while at the same time diminishing the positive characteristics and enumerating the negative characteristics of his opponents. Paul appeals to pathos when he attempts to elicit heightened emotions in his audience by using exaggeration, metaphors, or subjects that would rouse such heightened emotions. Paul does follow Aristotle by appealing to pathos sparingly and relying most often on logic and ethos. Appeals are just one aspect of the classical rhetoric that Paul applies to his compositions.

Paul’s language is itself an enigma. The culturally expected language Paul should use in his letters would be indicative of the friendship language or perhaps more appropriate language that supported the hierarchical relationships that were so important in “Greco-Roman” culture. Instead, and contrary to Aristotle, Paul uses emotional and familial language interjecting terms such as brother, sister, father, children, comparing himself to a nurse caring for her children, and equating himself with a father and his Corinthian community as a chaste bride. Evidence of emotional terms include not only the familial but also, suffering, jealous, protect, love, great affection, and glad. Paul infuses his letters with Jewish imagery and prophecy in addition to the dominant cultural expectations. Paul utilizes all aspects of the world around him in composing his letters to his audiences. In addition to Paul’s unexpected use of familial and emotional language,

Paul employs ambiguous language and invented words, one of which is *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*, both of which Aristotle cautions the student of rhetoric to avoid.

Paul breaks with rhetorical convention and thus reveals to the audience that he is saying something significant so close observation is needed when Paul employs ambiguous language. Another explanation for Paul's break with convention is that for Paul the situation is an all or nothing outcome. For Paul, the situation with the Corinthians is not just a matter of winning just to win but it is a matter of life and death. Finally, Paul intentionally uses ambiguity in order to provide multiple messages depending on the audience. While the ambiguity of Paul's treatment of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* may appear as though Paul is strictly adhering to rhetorical convention in actuality Paul is not. The rhetorical convention of leaving one's opponents unidentified is valid however; Paul is not merely leaving them unidentified if he were he would not have used an invented word. The invention of the word itself indicates that Paul intends the term to be read as sarcastic. The invention of the word is a break with traditional convention and indicates something important. Paul is saying much more about *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* by inventing a word in order to leave the group "unidentified." If Paul draws that much attention to the group, which according to rhetorical convention is unwise because it provides the group with status, Paul is saying something more than that one specific historical group who opposes him in Corinth. The ambiguous and invented nature of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* allows for multiple audiences to hear this term and apply it to whoever possesses the characteristics that Paul presents, namely one who teaches a gospel, Christ, and spirit different or strange from the one Paul teaches; someone who is

“other” or at odds with Paul’s teaching. Paul uses ambiguity to his advantage and it serves as a means of illuminating Paul’s focus. The focus for Paul is on the message.

Furthermore, ambiguity is not exclusive to just Paul’s language. 2 Corinthians’ rhetorical classification is not obvious because Paul employs aspects of each of the rhetorical genres. Although Paul addresses *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* and the injuries they have perpetrated on Paul and the community that is not the focus of Paul’s letter. Paul’s purpose is not to praise and blame certain people although he does so in 2 Corinthians. The real focus of 2 Corinthians is to admonish and encourage the Corinthian community to take a course of action. Paul’s focus is to reveal to the Corinthians that the outsiders, *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* are preaching something that Paul considers dangerous. Overall Paul exhorts his audience, exhortation is the primary purpose of deliberative letters thus although 2 Corinthians may include aspects of forensic and epideictic genres the letter can be classified as deliberative. Understanding that Paul’s letter serves as an exhortation to the Corinthians provides insight into understanding *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* because the purpose of the letter helps the reader to put the term into the correct context. Because the audience is the Corinthians and the purpose is to exhort them to some action, the focus ceases to be on *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* and rather is on the message – Paul’s major objection. Within the context of classical rhetoric with Paul’s own twist *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* are much more universal than perhaps some may conclude.

Paul addresses other opponents in Philippians and Galatians but when he does so Paul is not as ambiguous or universal nor does Paul employ such vitriolic language. In Paul’s discussion of the opponents in Philippians and Galatians Paul addresses specific points of disagreement, circumcision, perverting the gospel, teachers preaching out of

their own desires. The difference between those and 2 Corinthians is Paul's response. Paul addresses specifics in his response to his opponents in Philippians and Galatians. Paul even recognizes that although teachers preach out of their own desire there is still a positive outcome – Christ is still preached. Paul may disagree with some presumably minor points of contention here but Paul's response in 2 Corinthians is not the same. Paul attacks the message of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι*, a different Christ, gospel, and spirit, and urges the Corinthian community to ostracize this group. Paul attacks more than just the message of *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* he attacks them, too, by comparing them to false teachers, deceitful workers, boasters and further comparing *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* to the cunning serpent who deceived Eve who is also akin to the ministers of Satan. These characteristics are what Paul uses to define *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* and they are negative generalizations there are no specific tangible qualities that one can attribute to a specific historic group. The group *ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι* appears to function as a discursive “other” to Paul's theology; they embody falsehood, boasting, hubris, and a false Christology – in short, they seem to symbolize the radical opposite of everything Paul himself stands for. They are a rhetorical “other” in contradiction with what Paul teaches.

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