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Innehåll

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Suffering as Defense of Paul’s Apostolic Authority in Galatians and 2 Corinthians 11

JAMES A. KELHOFFER

Introduction

This article examines how in Galatians 4–6 Paul not only confirms his apostolic status as one who has suffered but also attacks his opponents for avoiding persecution. In the second half of the paper we shall consider a similar – and more detailed – argument concerning Paul’s suffering and authority in 2 Corinthians 11. To these ends in Galatians, Paul mentions suffering and persecution at several junctures, including the following: the two sons Abraham had with Sarah and Hagar (Gal 4:21–31, especially 4:29; cf. Genesis 16; 21); Paul’s experience of persecution (Gal 5:11); his opponents’ avoidance of persecution (6:12); and Paul’s bearing in his body the “marks” of Jesus and therefore not meriting trouble from the Galatian agitators (6:17):

But just as at that time the child who was born according to the flesh persecuted (διόκω) the child who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. (Gal 4:29)

But my friends, why am I still being persecuted (διόκω) if I am still preaching circumcision? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed (καταργέω). (Gal 5:11)

It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised – only lest they be persecuted for the cross of Christ (μόνον ἵνα τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μὴ διώκωνται). (Gal 6:12)
From now on, let no one make trouble for me (κόπος μοι μηδείς παρεχέτω), for I bear in my body the marks of Jesus (ἐγὼ γὰρ τὰ στιγματὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματί μου βαστάζω). (Gal 6:17)

Inasmuch as these passages in Galatians argue consistently about Paul’s status in relation to that of his Christian opponents because he suffers persecution and they do not, we may consider them together.

Galatians 4–6: The Agitators as Avoiders of Persecution, and Paul’s Authenticating His Authority by Suffering

Paul’s allegorical interpretation of Genesis 16 and 21 concerning Abraham’s two sons offers an archetypal precedent for the present crisis in the Galatian churches (Gal 4:21–31; cf. ἀλληγορέω, Gal 4:24). Paul first specifies that Sarah and her offspring stand for freedom, and Hagar and her son for slavery (4:22–24). The allegation that Ishmael persecuted Isaac (διώκω, 4:29) further detracts from the legitimacy of Hagar’s offspring and anyone associated with Ishmael’s legacy. Notably, the allegation of persecution is absent in Genesis 16 and 21. If anyone in the pertinent Genesis narratives were to be labeled a persecutor, it would arguably be Sarah, who “dealt harshly with her [Hagar], and she [Hagar] ran away from her” into the wilderness – a place of danger to both mother and son (Gen 16:6b; cf. 16:7–9; 21:9–21). Paul’s allegation of persecution in Gal 4:29 likely builds upon earlier Jewish haggadic tradition. Additionally, it reflects Paul’s construal of who is persecuting whom in the current Galatian crisis and the corresponding loss of honor and stature associated with such ignoble actions.

The significance of Paul’s charging Hagar’s offspring with persecution (4:29) is further illuminated by both Paul’s assertions later in this letter that he is currently being persecuted (5:11; cf. 6:17) and that his Christian opponents are intentionally avoiding persecution (6:12). Paul hereby claims the positive legacy of Sarah and Isaac for himself and those loyal

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1 In the LXX of Genesis the verb διώκω occurs only twice (Gen 14:15; 31:23) but not in Genesis 16 or 21. See further Hans Dieter Betz, Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 249–250 (on Gal 4:29): “The tradition that Ishmael ‘persecuted’ ἐδίωκεν Isaac is not found in the Old Testament. But we find traces of it in the Jewish haggadah, where Gen 21:9 פרטעלא (‘he jested, played, teased’) was interpreted in a hostile way.” Likewise F. F. Bruce, The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text (NIGTC; Exeter: Paternoster, 1982), 223–224 (on Gal 4:29).
to the Pauline gospel, who endure persecution “for the cross of Christ” (5:11; cf. 4:29). By contrast, the Galatian agitators’ cowardice and dishonor, evidenced by their avoiding persecution by proclaiming a false message (μόνον ἵνα τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μὴ διώκονται, 6:12), belongs to the legacy of Hagar’s offspring.

Paul’s accusations against his opponents’ legitimacy because they cowardly avoid persecution, which Paul has endured, may be considered also in light of 1 Thess 3:1–5 and Rom 8:17b. In 1 Thess 3:1–5 Paul states that the failure of the Thessalonians to endure hardships would have nullified their salvation. Moreover, according to Rom 8:17b suffering with Christ (συμπάσχω) is a necessary prerequisite to later being glorified with him (συνδοξάζω). By associating his opponents with Ishmael, an archetypal persecutor (Gal 4:29), and charging them with avoiding persecution by mandating circumcision (6:12), Paul in effect calls into question not merely their stature as trusted heralds of the gospel but fundamentally the validity of their standing in Christ.

Significantly, Gal 6:12, 17 occur in a concluding summary to the letter that was written by Paul himself, in order to highlight what Paul regarded as the letter’s most important points. The extent to which Paul treasures valuations of suffering in Galatians is therefore evidenced by his references to both his opponents’ avoiding persecution (6:12) and, by contrast, his bearing “the marks of Jesus” (6:17). Concerning the latter claim, when Paul demands that no one cause him trouble (κόπου μοι μηδεὶς παρ- εχέτω, 6:17a), the reason (γόρ, 6:17b) is that Paul has already suffered in ways analogous to Jesus’ passion. In a nutshell, Paul argues that he is entitled to be free of such disturbances because of his previous suffering, evidenced by the verifiable “marks” (στίγματα) left in, or on, his body. As

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2 See esp. 1 Thess 3:5, where Paul discloses his earlier fear for the Thessalonians “that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labor had been in vain (eiς κενὸν).” Cf. εν ταῖς θλίψεσιν ταύτας, 1 Thess 3:3.
3 Rom 8:17b: εἰπερ συμπάσχομεν ἵνα καὶ συνδοξάσωμεν.
4 Gal 6:11–18, esp. ἔγραψα τῇ ἐμῇ χειρί, 6:11. On this point see, e.g., Bruce, Galatians, 268 (on Gal 6:11); J. D. G. Dunn, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians (BNTC; London: Black, 1993), 335 (on Gal 6:11, 12); Betz, Galatians, 314 (on Gal 6:11): “The remark serves to authenticate the whole letter and emphasizes the points made in the following section of the postscript.”
5 Gk.: εν τῷ σώματι μου, Gal 6:17b; cf. 5:11. See further BDAG, 945, s.v. στίγμα: “Paul is most likely alluding to the wounds and scars which he received in the service of Jesus (Plut., Mor. 566f and Hierocles 12, 445 col. 1 στίγματα are the scars left by the divine rod of discipline).” So also Dunn, Galatians, 347 (on Gal 6:17). Cf. Michael
James D. G. Dunn notes, “The marks of his [Paul’s] identification with Jesus’ sufferings and death should be sufficient proof of the genuineness of his apostleship in the eyes even of the most conservative and trouble-making Christian Jew.”6 Yet even if Dunn is overly-optimistic that Paul’s opponents would have attributed value to Paul’s sufferings,7 Dunn’s point holds for the perspective that Paul expects the Galatian Christians still loyal to him will have concerning his authority as corroborated by suffering. Moreover, Paul argues that because his opponents cannot claim such a distinction and because they actually intentionally avoid persecution (so Gal 6:12), they therefore lack the stature to question his teaching and authority.

Paul’s claims about the value of his having been persecuted (Gal 5:11; 6:17) resonate with his affirmation earlier in this letter that he is once again suffering for the Galatians’ spiritual well-being: “My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth (ἐν πόνοις γεννήσεως) until Christ is formed in you, [20] I wish I were present with you now and could change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.”8 The adverb “again” (πάλιν, Gal 4:19) suggests that Paul had already suffered metaphorical birth pangs when converting them. For the Galatians one spiritual childbirth with Paul’s corresponding pain as their “mother” should have been enough. Paul leverages their causing him pain “again,” in order both to detract from the legitimacy of questioning the Pauline gospel and, moreover, to corroborate his sincerity toward them. As Richard N. Longenecker notes, moreover, the metaphor of a mother’s birth pangs pertains to both Paul and the Galatians: “Yet while the imagery here is that of Paul as a pregnant mother, it is also that of the Galatians themselves bearing Christ as a fetus in their wombs and needing a further gestation period for that fetus to be fully formed.”9 Accordingly, Gal 4:19–20 argues that because Paul suffers for them, especially now when it should not have been necessary, the wavering Galatians should trust him as their leader and be

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6 Dunn, Galatians, 347 (on Gal 6:17).
7 On this point see the discussion in the following subsection.
8 Gal 4:19–20; cf. 4:13; 1 Thess 2:13. Betz, Galatians, 268 (on Gal 4:19) notes that this statement comes “[w]ithout preparation” and suggests that Paul “refers to matters known to the Galatians as well as to himself, but unknown to us.” Cf. Bruce, Galatians, 236 (on Gal 5:11).
9 Longenecker, Galatians (WBC 41; Dallas: Word, 1990), 195 (on Gal 4:19).
prepared for any hardship associated with nurturing Christ to full gestation within them.

The Possibility of Rejoinder to Paul’s Claiming His Suffering Pain and Persecution as a Source of His Legitimacy

In several other letters Paul makes arguments similar to Gal 4:19–20. For example, in 2 Cor 2:1–3 Paul chastens the Corinthians for causing him pain, explaining that for this reason he had delayed visiting them again. Moreover, in Rom 9:2 Paul’s “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” suggest his compassion concerning Jews outside the Jesus movement and therefore his stature to address in Romans 9–11 their present and future standing in salvation history. Furthermore, Paul expresses solidarity with the Philippians over their and his grief concerning the health of his beloved coworker Epaphroditus. Unlike in Galatians, in Phil 2:27 Paul assumes a positive relationship with the Philippians. Likewise, in 2 Cor 2:1–3 Paul acknowledges good rapport with the Corinthians, although he recalls when this had not been the case and the Corinthians had caused him pain. During the earlier crisis in Corinth, an exhortation based upon how the Corinthians had unjustly pained Paul may well have fallen on deaf ears, especially among those in Corinth not loyal to Paul. Similarly, someone opposed to Paul’s theology as expressed in Romans 9–11 (or elsewhere) would likely place no value in the grief he expresses in Rom 9:2.

Concerning Galatians and Paul’s other letters where he offers valuations of his and others’ suffering, we may generalize that the appraisals are presented as though they were self-evident and beyond rejoinder. In letters such as Philippians and First Thessalonians, there is little reason to think that the audiences would have objected to Paul’s valuations. By contrast, concerning polemically disputed contexts such as Galatians and 2 Corinthians 11 (discussed immediately below), I submit that interpreters today should be reticent to accept uncritically Paul’s confidently presented

10 2 Cor 2:1–3: “So I made up my mind not to make you another painful visit (ἐν λύπη πρὸς ύμῶν ἔλθειν). [2] For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? [3] And I wrote as I did, so that when I came, I might not suffer pain from (ἰνα μὴ ἔλθων λυπην σχῶ) those who should have made me rejoice; for I am confident about all of you, that my joy would be the joy of all of you.”
11 Phil 2:27 (cf. 2:25–26): “He was indeed so ill that he nearly died. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, so that I would not have one sorrow after another (ἰνα μὴ λύπην ἐπὶ λύπην σχῶ).”
valuations as if they were beyond rejoinder among the addressees and especially among Paul’s opponents.

It is also relevant that in Gal 1:13–24 (esp. vv. 13, 24) Paul mentions his past as persecutor, but only in order to highlight his subsequent acceptance by Judean Christians. Moreover, in the polemical contexts of Galatians 1 and Philippians 3 Paul reflects no interest in reflecting on his potentially devalued status as a former persecutor of the church (pace 1 Cor 15:9–10). Absent in Gal 1:13, 24 is any reflection on the possible negative legacy of Paul’s past as persecutor of the church (pace 1 Cor 15:9–10). Indeed, although Paul affirms in Gal 1:23 that Judean Christians had at one point rejoiced over his transformation in Christ, there is no reason, historically speaking, to believe that all Judean Christians had in fact trusted, or at any rate had continued to trust, Paul and his message. More importantly, some of Paul’s Christian opponents may have continued to regard Paul as their persecutor even after he commenced work as Christ’s apostle to the Gentiles (cf. Gal 1:16; 2:7–8). This suggestion is plausible because although subsequent to Paul’s initial Christ-encounter the apostle’s theology had profoundly changed (cf. Gal 1:15–16), Paul’s opposition to these Christians’ theology had remained constant. Paul continued to oppose them, albeit for different reasons: previously, as Arland J. Hultgren observes, because Paul was “attempting to reverse the apostasy of Jewish Christians,”¹² and, later, at the time of Galatians because they proclaimed a false Christian gospel (Gal 1:6–9; cf. 1 Thess 2:14–16). Therefore, Paul’s Christian opponents may well have maintained that nothing of significance had changed in their relationship to Paul. After all, Paul remained their opponent, and perhaps also their persecutor, regardless of how much Christ may have transformed Paul’s message from that of a zealous Pharisee (cf. Phil 3:6; Gal 1:14) to that of a would-be herald of Christ.

The present analysis also suggests the potential – if not the inevitability – of competing valuations of suffering, especially when one or both parties in a dispute bring such valuations to bear upon a polemical context of contested authority. Neither Paul nor his Galatian opponents would have accepted the other’s claims to having been oppressed, maligned or otherwise unjustly treated by the other party, since each side defied the other out of loyalty to their different conceptions of the Christian gospel. Interpreters

today should therefore be cautious to embrace Paul’s valuations of his (or others’) suffering as if they were, or are, somehow objectively “true.” Certainly they were “true” for Paul and constituted a key part of his argument to reestablish his authority among the Galatians. Moreover, we must allow for the likelihood that Paul’s opponents would have responded to his arguments with their own (de)valuations of the worth of Paul’s suffering as a corroboration of authority if they had known about them, possibly also offering affirmations concerning their own suffering. These at times diametrically opposed appraisals of suffering’s value, along with arguments about the legacy of our father Abraham, would likely have played a decisive role in determining which, if any,\textsuperscript{13} version of the Christian gospel the churches in Galatia would ultimately embrace. The discussion to follow will bring such interpretive questions to bear upon 2 Cor 11:23c–33, where Paul leverages his many sufferings in response to accusations from the “super-apostles” in Corinth.

Paul’s Hardships as Rejoinder to the “Super-Apostles” and Their Supporters in Corinth (2 Cor 11:23c–33)

In 2 Cor 11:23c–33 Paul recounts his sufferings to defend his authority against the “super-apostles,” who denied that Paul belonged to their apostolic cohort. This is Paul’s longest and most detailed discussion of his sufferings in his surviving letters. Above we have examined how in the polemical context of Galatians Paul more briefly offers his suffering as authentication of his sincerity toward the Galatians (Gal 4:19–20) and confirmation of his status as Christ’s apostle (Gal 5:11; 6:17). One question we shall seek to address is how in the likewise contentious context of 2 Corinthians 11–12 Paul finds it useful to discuss his sufferings in so much greater detail.

In order to answer this question, we will first offer a few observations about the accusations from Christian opponents that Paul acknowledges in 2 Corinthians 11–12. This will help us to ascertain how 2 Cor 11:23c–33 functions within this larger context. Afterward our analysis of 2 Cor 11:23c–33 will follow. It will be argued that the passage’s length and specificity can be partially explained by differences in emphasis between

\textsuperscript{13} Cf. the argument of Troy W. Martin, “The Covenant of Circumcision (Genesis 17:9–14) and the Situational Antitheses in Gal 3:28,” \textit{JBL} 122 (2003): 111–125, that the Galatians were considering relapsing into paganism, and thus rejecting the messages of both Paul and his Christian opponents.
Galatians and 2 Corinthians 11–12. Whereas Galatians addresses not only Paul’s calling and authority but also competing Christian interpretations of the Abrahamic covenant, 2 Corinthians 11–12 is concerned primarily with Paul’s status and conduct. We will also examine how in 2 Corinthians 11–12 Paul names “false brethren” among the “dangers” he has faced, thereby associating them with his persecutors and diminishing the status of those who question his standing as an apostle. Finally, we will consider the argument of Margaret E. Thrall that 2 Cor 11:23c–33 reflects a valuation of Paul’s suffering to counterbalance his lack of a credential of having been a follower of the earthly Jesus, which the original apostles could of course claim. It will be argued that Thrall’s argument is possible but unproven.

Literary Context: Charges and Responses in 2 Corinthians 11–12

In 2 Corinthians 11–12 Paul offers six responses to his critics, whom he construes as “false apostles” and agents of Satan (2 Cor 11:13–15). Clearly Paul’s aim with these arguments is not to convince his opponents but rather to persuade the Corinthians that he – and not these other apostolic claimants – deserves their loyalty. Of particular interest to our analysis is that within 2 Corinthians 11–12 only when Paul discusses his suffering (11:23c–33) does he not specify a particular accusation to which his

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14 Gk.: κινδύνοις ἐν ψευδάδελφοις, 2 Cor 11:26i. Cf. ψευδοπόστολοι, 2 Cor 11:13.
15 The present analysis does not require a particular position concerning the literary integrity of Second Corinthians and its possibly composite nature. On this problem, see Udo Schnelle, The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998 [1994]), 79–87. It strikes me as quite implausible that, at the same time and to the same congregation, Paul would reflect the polemical context of an unresolved conflict in 2 Corinthians 10–13 and in the same purported letter acknowledge a past conflict between Paul and the Corinthians that has already been resolved (2 Cor 2:1–3). In my view, 2 Corinthians 10–13 most likely reflects either a context prior to the resolution predicated in 2 Cor 2:1–3 or a subsequent worsening of that situation.
16 The present analysis acknowledges that we cannot know with certainty precisely how Paul’s opponents in Corinth criticized him, as well as the possibility that there may have been additional allegations from the super-apostles that Paul chose neither to acknowledge nor to attempt to refute in 2 Corinthians 11–12. It is also relevant that in 2 Corinthians 10–12 Paul plays a role that his critics have forced upon him and out of necessity is now “speaking irrationally” (2 Cor 11:23; cf. 11:17a; 12:11), as it were. Since Paul’s apostolic authority has been fundamentally questioned in Corinth, I regard it as highly unlikely that Paul would have invented such unflattering accusations of himself simply in order to respond to them. No religious leader (or politician) desires such “bad publicity.” For this reason, the discussion will proceed on the basis that Paul responds to actual charges, at least as he understood them, whether from having visited Corinth (cf. 2 Cor 2:1–4) or
suffering for Christ may respond. The following chart summarizes Paul’s six responses, as well as the corresponding five charges that he acknowledges:

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<th>Paul’s Defense</th>
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<td>(1) Paul is “untrained in speech” (ιδιωτης τω λογω, 2 Cor 11:6a).</td>
<td>(1) Paul concedes the allegation but dismisses its relevance (11:5–6), since he is not inferior with respect to knowledge (αλλ’ ου τη γνωσει, 11:6b).</td>
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<td>(2) Paul did not collect money from the Corinthians to support his ministry, because he lacked the authority to do so (11:7–11).</td>
<td>(2) Paul corroborates this authority by having “robbed” (συλαω, 11:8) congregations other than Corinth (cf. 12:13–16a).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) [no allegation specified]</td>
<td>(3) Paul highlights his many sufferings for Christ (2 Cor 11:23c–33).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Paul did not receive “visions and revelations from the Lord” (12:1).</td>
<td>(4) Paul either ridicules this criterion through parody or confirms that he satisfies it (12:1–10).</td>
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<tr>
<td>(5) Paul did not perform the “signs” (σημεια, 12:12a) of a true apostle.</td>
<td>(5) Paul did indeed perform “signs, wonders and deeds of power” among the Corinthians (12:12b).</td>
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<tr>
<td>(6) Paul has taken financial advantage of the Corinthians (12:16b).</td>
<td>(6) Paul denies that he, Titus or “the brother” did anything dishonest in Corinth (12:17–18).</td>
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At five of six points when Paul defends himself – concerning his ineptness as an orator, not collecting money for himself in Corinth, receiving “visions and revelations,” performing miracles, and the conduct of Titus and perhaps a communication from his co-workers or others loyal to Paul (cf. 1 Cor 1:11; 16:17).

See further 2 Cor 12:17–18: “Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? [18] I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Titus did not take advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves with the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?” Paul apparently reflects a misunderstanding stemming from his having sent Titus to Corinth, in order to collect for the poor Judean saints (cf. 2 Corinthians 8–9).

So H. D. Betz, *Der Apostel Paulus und die sokratische Tradition: Eine exegetische Untersuchung zu seiner “Apologie” 2 Korinther 10–13* (BHT 45; Tübingen, Mohr [Siebeck], 1972), esp. 84–89.

another brother, whom Paul had presumably sent to collect for the poor Judean saints – he explicitly acknowledges the charge leveled against his apostolic stature. Standing in contrast to these five instances (2 Cor 11:5–6, 7–11; 12:1–4, 12, 16b–18) is the longest of Paul’s defenses concerning his suffering (11:23c–33). After considering this passage in detail, we will return to the question of why it is also so much longer than Paul’s numerous references in other letters to his suffering and to what charge Paul may have responded in 2 Cor 11:23c–33.

Exegetical Observations: 2 Cor 11:23c–33

The passage begins with Paul’s stating that he meets the credentials of his opponents in being Jewish (11:22) and one of Christ’s διάκονοι (11:23a).20 Paul also emphasizes that he would rather not have to address this theme. Out of necessity, then, Paul is now “speaking irrationally.”21 Later in the letter Paul will reiterate this sentiment: “I have been a fool (γέγονα ἀφρων)! You forced me to it (ὑμεῖς με ἰναγκάσατε). Indeed you should have been the ones commending me, for I am not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing” (12:11). Accordingly, Paul’s self-defense invoking his suffering and other activities as an apostle not only entails dismissing the super-apostles’ accusations but also, implicitly, criticizing the Corinthians for their disloyalty and compelling (ἀναγκάζω, 12:11a) Paul to defend himself.

Concerning the relative status of Paul and his opponents as διάκονοι (11:23a), with ὑπὲρ ἐγώ (“I am more [than that],” 11:23b) Paul claims a higher standing: he is either a better διάκονος than they are or, unlike his opponents, more than that.22 Each of the four attributions of Paul’s opponents – as Hebrews, Israelites, descendants of Abraham and Christ’s “servants” – seems to have been incontestable,23 inasmuch as Paul’s oppo-

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21 Gk.: παραφρονῶν λαλῶ, 2 Cor 11:23b; cf. ὦς ἐν ἀφροσύνη, 11:17a.


ponents claimed status as Christ’s “servants,” just as Paul did. For Paul this situation necessitated both affirming that he meets these criteria and claiming a superior standing relative to his opponents. If elsewhere Paul claims to meet their criteria, for example, concerning miracle-working or receiving “visions and revelations” (cf. 12:1–12), in the area of endurance in suffering he claims a distinct advantage.

The contrast with Paul’s earlier humble self-presentation to the Corinthians as “the least of the apostles” is quite striking (ὁ ἐλάχιστος τῶν ἀποστόλων, 1 Cor 15:9a). Unlike when he wrote First Corinthians, Paul now realizes that other apostolic claimants deny his apostolic standing.²⁴ Addressing this context of disputed authority, Paul offers his many sufferings as “proof” of his asserted differentiation in status (cf. ὑπὲρ ἐγώ, 2 Cor 11:23b). Despite the length and numerous examples in 11:23c–33, the argument is really quite simple: the διάκονος of Christ who has suffered more has the greater stature. In 1 Cor 15:9–10 the argument runs in the opposite direction: because Paul once persecuted the church he has a lower status among the apostles.

To make explicit this basis of placing himself above his Christian opponents, Paul uses the comparative form of the adverb περισσοτέρως (“far more” [two occurrences], 11:23c, 23d) together with ὑπερβαλλόντως (“to a much greater degree,” 11:23e).²⁵ Such comparisons between Paul and the super-apostles implicitly acknowledge that Paul’s opponents too may have suffered in serving Christ.²⁶ In 11:23c–e Paul contends that he has suffered more than they have and can therefore claim the stronger argument for corroborating authority on this basis. Afterward the adverbs πολλάκις (11:23f), πεντάκις (11:24), τρίς (11:25a), ἄπαξ (11:25b), τρίς (11:25c; cf. 11:25a), νυχθήμερον (11:25d) and,

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²⁴ Therefore, 1 Cor 1:11–13 only scratches the surface concerning the divisions and opposition to Paul’s authority present in Corinth.

²⁵ Likewise Niels Willert, “The Catalogues of Hardships in the Pauline Correspondence: Background and Function,” in Peder Borgen and Søren Giversen (eds.), The New Testament and Hellenistic Judaism (Aarhus: Aarhus University, 1995), 217–243 at 239: “It is my contention that Paul also and not least legitimates himself when he is talking about his adversities and sufferings. In fact he is surpassing the ‘head apostles’ in suffering, which means that he is surpassing in Christ identification.”

²⁶ It is an open and unanswerable question whether the super-apostles, like Paul, would have used suffering to corroborate their standing as Christ’s ministers. See further below on this point.
again, πολλάκις (11:26a; cf. 11:23f) reinforce this point, as do the eightfold repetition of the dative plural κινδύνοις ("dangers," 11:26b–i) concerning Paul’s “travel dangers”\(^{27}\) and the general discomforts enumerated in 11:27. Moreover, the last of the “dangers” that Paul mentions stems from “false brethren.”\(^{28}\) Naming “false brethren” as a source of Paul’s “dangers” implicitly criticizes his opponents, associating them with his persecutors and thus further detracting from their legitimacy.\(^ {29}\)

In 11:28 Paul describes his emotional, rather than physical, hardship concerning the pressure of his daily “responsibility” (ἐπίστασις) and “anxiety for all the churches” (ἡ μέριμνα πασῶν τῶν ἐκκλησίας). Above we have discussed a similar appeal in Gal 4:19–20, whereby Paul’s metaphorical “pain of childbirth” corroborates his sincerity toward the Galatians and why they should trust him. In 2 Cor 11:28 we see essentially the same plea, except that it concerns not only the Corinthians but “all the churches.” The broader referent in 2 Cor 11:28 indirectly corroborates Paul’s authority as an apostle not just in Corinth, where the super-apostles and their followers oppose him, but in the church as a whole.

The subsequent verses emphasize Paul’s weakness (ἀσθενέω, 2 Cor 11:29), his boasting in his weakness (ἀσθενεία, 11:30; cf. 12:5, 9–10; Rom 5:3) and his truthfulness, citing God as his witness (2 Cor 11:31). As mentioned above concerning 2 Cor 12:11, inasmuch as Paul’s self-defense concerning his suffering entails not only refuting the super-apostles’ accusations but also implicitly criticizing the disloyal Corinthians, the juridically construed context of 11:31 calls God as witness against the very addressees whom Paul wishes to persuade.

The final two verses of this passage summarize an anecdote about Paul’s narrow escape from Damascus, attested also, albeit differently, in the Acts of the Apostles.\(^ {30}\) In contrast to the concise and parallel formula-

\(^{27}\) Cf. Jan Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians* (SP 8; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 197.

\(^{28}\) Gk.: κινδύνοις ἐν ψευδαδέλφοις, 2 Cor 11:26i; cf. ψευδαδέλφοι, Gal 2:4; ψευδόποστολοι, 2 Cor 11:13.

\(^{29}\) Cf. 1 Thess 2:14–16, where Paul names both Jewish and Gentile persecutors but focuses almost entirely on the former. In naming “dangers” from bandits, Jews, Gentiles and false brethren, among other hazards, 2 Cor 11:26 depicts more broadly Paul’s persecutors.

\(^{30}\) 2 Cor 11:32–33; cf. Acts 9:23–25. A significant difference between these two accounts, noted, e.g., by Barrett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 304 (on 2 Cor 11:32–33), is that whereas Paul says that he fled from King Aretas, in Acts Paul flees from “the Jews,” who were plotting to kill him. See further Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians: Translated with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (AB 32A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 541–542 (on 2 Cor 11:32–33); Thrall, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 770–771.
tions of 2 Cor 11:23c–27, verses 32–33 stand out for their quasi-narrative quality. Rather than adding to the preceding argument, they culminate this section with a final example. In the following verse (12:1) Paul takes up a different problem concerning “visions and revelations of the Lord.” Accordingly, Paul concludes his argument in 11:23c–33 without ever revealing to what specific charge, if any, he responds with recourse to his sufferings.

Conclusion: Valuations of Paul’s Suffering to His Self-defense in 2 Cor 11:23c–33

At only two points in 2 Cor 11:23c–33 does Paul offer a clear indication of why he mentions his sufferings at such great length. For one thing, Paul’s sufferings demonstrate his superior stature (ὑπὲρ ἐγώ, 11:23a) relative to the super-apostles. With this argument Paul places himself above his opponents because he has suffered the most (cf. πέρισσος, ύπερβαλλόντως, 11:23c–e). Furthermore, Paul lowers his opponents’ stature by indirectly connecting them with “false brethren” and a source of his “dangers” (κινδύνοις ἐν ψευδαδέλφοις, 11:26i), which suggests that they should not be trusted. Additionally, the following paragraphs will consider a third possible valuation of Paul’s suffering as compensation for his not having followed the earthly Jesus.

Remarkably, in 2 Cor 11:23c–33 Paul never uses the term “apostle,” which of course is the key recognition that he and his Christian opponents would not acknowledge for each other. This is also true for Paul’s appeals to his suffering in Galatians (Gal 4:19–20; 5:11; 6:17). Perhaps this ostensible omission in 2 Cor 11:23c–33 bespeaks an accusation against Paul that would have been too risky or damaging for him to recognize explicitly: Paul states that he is “more” than a διάκονος (ὑπὲρ ἐγώ, 11:23b)

31 Frederick W. Danker, II Corinthians (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 185 (on 2 Cor 11:30–33) and Martin, 2 Corinthians, 387 mention the possibility “that Paul’s objectors had fastened on this incident, distorted it, and turned it into an accusation of a cowardly escape from Damascus.” If correct, 2 Cor 11:32–33 would participate in a debate whether Paul’s cowardice speaks against his standing or, alternatively, corroborates it since he faced danger.

32 Throughout 2 Corinthians 11–12 the only time Paul uses ἀπόστολος in reference to himself is 12:12 concerning Paul’s performing “the signs of an apostle.” Cf. 2 Cor 11:13 concerning Paul’s opponents: οἱ γὰρ τοιοῦτοι ψευδαπόστολοι, ἔργαται δόλοι, μετασχηματιζόμενοι εἰς ἀπόστολους Χριστοῦ. See further Lambrecht, Second Corinthians, 190 (on 2 Cor 11:23): “Paul may avoid the title ‘apostle’ in v. 23. In any case, it would have been difficult to write that title after 11:13 (‘false apostles’).”
but does not in this instance reveal the reason why his opponents dispute his apostleship. Margaret Thrall, apparently following Ernst Käsemann, argues that part of the dispute between Paul and his opponents lay in different definitions of the term “apostle.” According to Thrall, if Paul at all belonged to the apostles, he was only a lesser apostle and not an original apostle of the earthly Jesus. Notably, Acts 1:21–22 explicitly affirms such a criterion – that an apostle must have followed the earthly Jesus and witnessed the resurrection – for Judas’ eventual replacement Matthias.

If we were to credit Paul’s opponents in 2 Corinthians 10–13 with invoking such a criterion for apostleship, Paul could not possibly qualify. Moreover, the requirement of having followed the earthly Jesus would render invalid any claim to a post-resurrection revelation of Christ to Paul imputing the status of an apostle (cf. Gal 1:15–16). This in turn could explain why in 2 Corinthians 11–12 Paul acknowledges the specific charge to which he responds at five points (2 Cor 11:5–6, 7–11; 12:1–4, 12, 16b–18) but does not do so in 11:23c–33. If Thrall’s inference is correct, it

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35 Acts 1:21–22: “So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, [22] beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us – one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.” Cf. Mark 3:14 par. Although the witness of Acts is (possibly much) later than Paul, there is no reason to suppose that the criterion of Acts 1:21–22 is particular to Lukan theology or a post-Pauline development. Notably, Acts usually does not refer to Paul as an apostle. Although Acts does twice refer to Paul as an apostle (14:6, 14), Acts 15:2 distinguishes Paul and Barnabas from the apostles, and the term “apostle” is absent from the commissioning narrative of Acts 13:1–3.

36 Willert, “Catalogues of Hardships,” 239 also suggests this possibility: “Maybe the difference between the two parts [i.e., Paul and the super-apostles] is a question of having followed Jesus or not. While the first disciples experienced persecutions in following Jesus, Paul at the beginning did not. Instead he was a persecutor, and it may have given him problems. That the difference between Paul and the other apostles might have given him problems, can be seen in 1 Cor 9 and 15.1–11.”
would suggest a valuation of suffering to compensate for the credential that Paul lacked as one who had not followed the earthly Jesus. Similarly, when later in this letter Paul boasts about the “thorn” in his flesh, his suffering could be construed as a compensatory credential when the Lord says to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9; cf. 12:6–8).

Accordingly, if Paul needed to respond to a criterion like that attested in Acts 1:21–22, his long discussion of suffering in 2 Cor 11:23c–33 would offer the response that although he did not follow the earthly Jesus, his sufferings nonetheless demonstrate sufficient affiliation with and loyalty to Jesus in the post-resurrection period to corroborate his apostolic status. In a much more compact form, we find elements of such an affirmation already in 1 Cor 15:9–10: Paul the former persecutor of the church is the “least of the apostles,” and after his encounter with Christ he has worked harder than any of the other apostles. Yet viewed in light of the crisis acknowledged in 2 Corinthians 11–12, Paul’s naming himself as “least” (ἐλαχιστός) and assuming the unity of the apostolate in 1 Cor 15:9–10 turned out to be naïvely optimistic and would not subsequently have served Paul’s self-defense against the super-apostles.

We are now prepared to answer the question whether, with Thrall, we should construe the criterion attested in Acts 1:21–22 as suggestive of the charge to which Paul responds in 2 Cor 11:23c–33 but, for understandable reasons, would have been loathe to acknowledge. The preceding discussion outlines the implications of this attractive hypothesis. In the end, however, it must be regarded as plausible yet unproven. Paul need not at every point in 2 Corinthians 11–12 acknowledge the charge to which he responds or, for that matter, even be responding to a particular accusation from the super-apostles. Instead of adopting a strictly defensive posture, Paul may go on the offensive, asserting his superior status as a church leader over the false apostles (cf. 11:13), whom he claims could not boast to have suffered as much as he had. Whatever the differences between Paul’s and his opponents’ definition(s) of “apostle” and the latter’s allegations concerning Paul’s deficiencies, in 11:23c–33 Paul attributes to his

37 With McClelland, “‘Super-apostles, Servants of Christ, Servants of Satan’: A Response,” 83: “For she [M. E. Thrall] is unable to demonstrate any undeniable proof that the authority which the opponents may have claimed from Jerusalem actually existed.”

38 E.g., Furnish, II Corinthians, 532 connects 2 Cor 11:23c–33 with the following section concerning “visions and revelations” (12:1–10). Likewise, Thrall, Second Epistle to the Corinthians, 733 regards 2 Cor 11:23b–12:10 as Paul’s “argumentatio.”
sufferings such a value as to more than compensate for any such deficit and, moreover, to demonstrate Paul’s superior standing relative to them (cf. ὑπὲρ ἔγχω, 11:23b). Accordingly, as Frederick W. Danker notes, because of Paul’s many sufferings the Corinthians should accept Paul as their “distinguished benefactor.”

Therefore, although the specific context in which Paul highlights his sufferings is quite difficult to ascertain precisely, we find Paul in 2 Corinthians 11, as in Galatians 4–6, highlighting the value of his hardships in defense of his authority. Moreover, as was argued above for Paul’s opponents in Galatians, we must likewise acknowledge the likelihood that the super-apostles and their supporters in Corinth (cf. 1 Cor 1:11–13) would have rejected Paul’s valuation of his suffering in 2 Cor 11:23c–33. The possibility must also be recognized that super-apostles may have had their own assessment of the value of Paul’s, as well as their, suffering.

The passages in Galatians and Second Corinthians this article has examined are by no means the only NT texts that assign value to suffering out of faithfulness to the gospel. Phil 3:10b, for example, explains why Paul does not merely accept or tolerate hardships but rather highlights their value for the purpose of knowing (τοῦ γνῶσαι) “the power of his [Christ’s] resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings” by becoming like him in his death,” erstwhile exhorting the Philippians likewise to continue to be prepared to endure hardship. Yet within the corpus Paulinum it is only in Galatians 4–6 and 2 Corinthians 11 that Paul’s sufferings are

39 Danker, II Corinthians, 181 (on 2 Cor 11:23): because of Paul’s many peristaseis he should “be standing firmly on his feet as a distinguished benefactor who has endured so much for the sake of the gospel.”
30 So also Willert, “Catalogues of Hardships,” 239: “I find it most probable that the opponents too may have talked about sufferings as experienced by the disciples of Jesus. Perhaps they also made use of peristasis catalogues.” Cf. Käsemann, “Die Legitimität des Apostels,” 501–503.
41 E.g., 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14–16; 3:1–7; Phil 1:29–30; 2:17–18; 1 Cor 12:26; Rom 5:2–5; 8:17b.
42 Cf. Peter T. O’Brien, The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 403 (on Phil 3:10), who notes that τὴν δύναμιν τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ καὶ [τὴν] κοινωνίαν [τῶν] παθημάτων αὐτοῦ is a single unit in which “power” and “sufferings” are inseparably joined.
used in arguments defending Paul’s apostolic authority. Such assertions merit additional examination in light of other early Christian literature, including the Acts of the Apostles, which similarly links the suffering and persecution of Peter, Paul and other recognized Christian leaders to arguments concerning legitimation.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{44} For example, Acts 5:40–41; 7:51–60; 9:16; 14:19.