Forced by circumstances to do so, Paul in his correspondence with the Corinthians denied that he spoke with rhetorical finesse but claimed to be a layman in speech (2 Cor 11:6; 1 Cor 2:1–5). Measuring him by their own classicistic canons, most of the church fathers agreed with him. It is true that Augustine, although he thought that Paul was not trained in rhetoric, nevertheless discovered in him an eloquence issuing from inspiration that at times corresponded to classical rules.\(^1\) On the other hand, some writers such as Tatian evidently sought to improve Paul's style by paraphrasing his letters.\(^2\) For the most part, however, those writers who commented on Paul's style were content to describe the rudeness of his speech as earthen vessels (2 Cor 4:7) in which divine knowledge and wisdom were kept and to discover two purposes for it: (1) that it be evident that the power of the Christian message resided in God and not human eloquence,\(^3\) and (2) that rudeness of style was appropriate to and effective with the humble social ranks where the gospel was hospitably received.\(^4\)

In recent years, NT scholars have returned with some vigor to the examination of Paul's rhetorical strategy in his letters.\(^5\) Interest has also of late been shown in a particular aspect of rhetoric, namely, epistolary

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\(^{1}\) This view is seen especially in his *De doctrina christiana*. See Edwin A. Judge, “Paul's Boasting in Relation to Contemporary Professional Practice,” *ABR* 16 (1968): 38–40.

\(^{2}\) According to Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.29.6, despite the criticism by Tatian himself (Or. 26) of pagan linguistic fastidiousness. As further representatives of this tendency one should also include those Atticizing copyists who were obviously unsatisfied with Paul's language.


theory, and the ways in which it may illuminate Paul’s letters for us.⁶ The present article represents this latter interest. Writers of rhetorical bent frequently commented on different types of letters and the styles appropriate to them; handbooks containing some theory and sample letters were composed; and instruction in letter writing on this level began at the beginning of tertiary education and perhaps as early as the latter stages of the secondary curriculum.⁷ The subject was thus not arcane. This material makes us aware of a different dimension of Paul’s letters, as I wish to illustrate by drawing attention to 2 Cor 10:10 and, especially, the apocryphal correspondence between Paul and the Roman philosopher Seneca.

**PAUL’S LETTERS TO THE CORinthians**

Paul’s correspondence with the Corinthians contains a striking number of references to and comments on his letter writing. Already in 1 Corinthians it is evident that Paul had not been successful in communicating by letter (1 Cor 5:9–11), and he is at pains to state explicitly what his intention in writing is (4:14; 9:15).⁸ Perhaps Paul protests too much when he later insists that he only writes what his readers can understand (2 Cor 1:13–14), but his insistence does underline the self-consciousness with which he wrote letters to the Corinthians. He stresses that he would rather see his readers in person (1 Cor 16:5–7; 2 Cor 1:15–16),⁹ yet he is ambivalent about visiting them (1 Cor 4:18–21; 2 Cor 1:23). In any event, circumstances, sometimes of his own making, forced him to communicate with them by letter.

One such letter, which Paul claims to have written out of his own grief | (2 Cor 2:4), was successful because it made his readers grieve to the point of repenting (2 Cor 7:8–11). This letter was evidently written in the style of the letter of grief described in the epistolary handbooks, in which a writer

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⁷ The material is collected and discussed in Abraham J. Malherbe, *Ancient Epistolary Theorists* (SBLSBS 19; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

⁸ For a similar reticence about writing, see Demosthenes, *Ep.* 1.3; Isocrates, *Ep.* 1.2; Phil. 25–26; and Hughes, *Early Christian Rhetoric*, 19.

⁹ Cf. 1 Thess 2:17–18; 3:20. Given Paul’s anxiety for his churches (see 2 Cor 11:28), this epistolary cliche nevertheless can be taken to express Paul’s genuine feeling.