

THE EPISTLES OF ST. PAUL TO THE CORINTHIANS.*

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It is possible to view the character of St. Paul from many widely differing standpoints. To some, he is the inspired apostle, the Divinely commissioned messenger to the Gentile world. To others, he is a remarkable Jew who elaborated certain peculiar views of his own about the person and the work of Christ Jesus,—views which he impressed with such vigor on his fellow believers that they have dominated the thought of Christendom till the present day. There is one point, however, on which all students of his life and epistles must heartily agree. They must admit that rarely in the history of the human race have so many varied gifts been bestowed on any one individual as those with which the personality of St. Paul was enriched.

The portions of his correspondence that remain to us are the best witness to his complex and many sided character. He is, on the one hand, the theologian, the mystic, the preacher, the student of Old Testament Scripture. Of these powers *Romans*, *Colossians*, *Ephesians* and *Philippians* are the abiding monument. On the other hand, he is the organizer, the administrator, the man of affairs in the fullest sense of that term. For the most ample proof of this we need look no further than the two Epistles to the Corinthians.

These two are, in a sense, more “occasional” than any of the extant epistles. They are concerned with the men, the problems, the errors and the vices of the Corinthian community at that time. St. Paul is distracted between

* Three articles will follow this from the pen of Dr. Walker in successive issues of THE REVIEW AND EXPOSITOR. Two articles will deal with the contents of First Corinthians and one with the contents of Second Corinthians.—Editor.

affection for his converts, grief at their faults and wrath at the Jewish emissaries who are splitting the church into factions and alienating its members from himself. In no other epistles have we such rapid changes in the writer's mood. Tender affection, stern denunciation, contemptuous sarcasm, passionate vindication of himself and his work—follow one another in quick succession. And yet in the midst of all this we have wise counsel on detailed points of practice—on the proper conduct of married life, on the duties of parents, on the right standard of conduct for the Christian in general society. We have, too, the series of injunctions about the Holy Communion and the elaborate discussion of the nature and use of spiritual gifts. We have his lyrical outburst—the matchless passage on Love, and we have that first great doctrinal essay—the chapter on the Resurrection.

The second epistle contains a piece of unique autobiography, the vivid sketch of the toils and persecutions amidst which his life was spent—followed later by the account of his heavenly visions, and of the personal affliction, sent to him, he believed, lest he should be “exalted overmuch.” Between these passages is inserted the lengthy and business-like account of the arrangements for the contributions for the Christian poor at Jerusalem.

Even so slight a survey as this gives some idea of the wealth and variety of matter contained in these two epistles. It is the aim of the following articles to survey their contents with somewhat greater fulness; to realize the situation in the church which called them forth; to appreciate the statesmanship and skill with which the apostle performed his task of government; to recall the permanent elements in his teaching and the message that they still bear for us.

Before, however, proceeding to a survey of the contents of these epistles, there are certain points connected with their history that need to be discussed. With re-

gard to the First, the need is very slight. No Pauline epistle has a stronger consensus of external and internal evidence to its genuineness; nor is there any question amongst reasonable critics as to its unity. But the case is very different with the Second. That it is Pauline and that it was written to Corinth no man, with a reputation for criticism to lose, would express any doubt. About its *unity* there is no such chance of agreement. In fact, there are few questions of New Testament criticism on which men, who are for the most part in agreement, find themselves so divided. The unity of 2 Corinthians is one of those questions, like the South Galatian theory and the authorship of 2 Peter, which seem to divide reasonable and reverent critics into two opposing camps.

The unity of the epistle, however, is by no means the only difficulty. In the course of it St. Paul speaks of earlier visits paid, and of earlier letters written to Corinth. The arrangement of these in chronological sequence, and the adjustment of them to other known events of St. Paul's career, seems to be a problem that is incapable of solution. In this respect the transition from 1 Corinthians to 2 Corinthians has been well compared to the passage from the clear paths of a laid-out park into the obscurity of a trackless forest. There have been, indeed, many intrepid explorers, and in most cases, each has struck out his own peculiar path. It has been a conspicuous case of *quot homines tot sententiae*.

It will serve to simplify our discussion of the unity of the 2nd Epistle, if we sketch quite briefly the previous history. To mention and discuss earlier contending theories as to the previous letters and visits would require much more space than can here be allowed. It must suffice therefore to indicate what seems on the whole to have been the most probable order of events. The ground will then be cleared for a discussion of the question whether or not we have within the limits of 2 Corinthians parts of two or more Pauline epistles.

St. Paul's first recorded visit to Corinth may probably be assigned to the year 52 A. D. Soon after his arrival in the city he made the acquaintance of Aquila and Prisca, who, along with the rest of the Jewish colony in Rome, had recently been expelled by an Imperial edict. There is a great deal of probability in the suggestion that the apostle's eager wish to see Rome and to preach the gospel there originated at this time from his conversations with these two friends. They, at any rate, were fresh from Rome and would have much to tell him of the local conditions. After the arrival of messengers with good news of the Macedonian churches, St. Paul was encouraged to preach the gospel with such uncompromising zeal that a breach with Judaism and the Synagogue took place. From the furious hostility of his countrymen the apostle was rescued by the judicial firmness and clear-sighted tolerance of Gallio. The stirring experiences of this visit occupied a space of eighteen months. When at the end of this time St. Paul departed for Syria, a Christian community in Corinth was an established fact.

Not long after his departure the Alexandrian Jew Apollos, whose knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures made him such a powerful advocate for Christ, was urged by his friends to visit Corinth. His vindication of Christianity was zealous and effective, but—possibly owing to the disordered condition of the church at Corinth—he seems to have taken an early opportunity of rejoining St. Paul at Ephesus. It must have been somewhere about this time that the apostle wrote to the Corinthian church the epistle to which he alludes in 1 Corinthians 5:9—a letter which is unfortunately lost. This lost epistle, however, was by no means his only point of contact with his Corinthian converts. They “of the household of Chloe” brought news to St. Paul. These people were not improbably representatives of a commercial house trading between Corinth and Ephesus. Their news was chiefly of faction and of party spirit carried to the wildest excess.

The information they brought was soon supplemented by a letter from the Corinthians, asking for the apostle's counsel on various points and incidentally giving him a further insight into their own disordered state.

The situation in Corinth was so grave that action of some kind was necessary. The claims of the work at Ephesus were so pressing that St. Paul could not go to Corinth in person. But he sent a messenger and he wrote a letter. The messenger was Timothy and the letter was our First Epistle to the Corinthians.

The probability is that Timothy did not reach Corinth. A comparison of St. Luke's words in Acts 19:22 with those of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:17, 16:10, makes it almost certain that he did not go beyond Macedonia. In the epistle that he sent, St. Paul deals with the whole situation that had been revealed, partly by the letter from Corinth, partly by the tidings brought by the messengers of Chloe.

It is at this point that the narrative of events that has hitherto been clear and indisputable, passes into the darkest obscurity. When the track appears to be so hopelessly lost, it is hardly to be wondered that each explorer prefers his own route to that suggested by any other. With the clear proviso, then, that the region through which we are passing is highly debatable, we may proceed to arrange the events in the following order:

There are passages in 2 Corinthians which justify the assumption that I Corinthians was conveyed to Corinth by Titus and a "brother" who remains un-named. The same passages indicate that on this occasion Titus began to organize the collection for the poor Christians at Jerusalem. It would appear that he then returned to St. Paul at Ephesus.

In the meantime opposition to the apostle was increasing at Corinth. The view is probably correct that regards the "Christ party" as a band of Jewish emissaries,

holding some sort of credentials from the church at Jerusalem, and animated by a bitter hostility to St. Paul and his work. So successful were their attacks upon him that he hastened in person to Corinth. The visit seems to have been brief, unsuccessful and humiliating.

St. Paul, however, would not give up the battle. He would not, without another effort, allow the church, on which he had spent so much toil, to be torn from his grasp. Titus was despatched to Corinth with another epistle—an epistle, this time, couched in severe and uncompromising terms. The epistle was so severe that, when it had once left his hands, the apostle was distracted by anxiety as to its possible effects. Would it win the Corinthians back to their allegiance—or would it be the last stroke that would finally sever them from him?

Under these circumstances, further work at Ephesus was impossible for him. His one desire was to meet Titus and hear the result of the epistle. Thinking to meet Titus on his return journey the distracted apostle went so far as Troas. There were opportunities here for evangelistic work—but he had not the heart to seize them. He wandered on into Macedonia still possessed by the one idea—of meeting Titus and learning the worst.

Here it was that the strain ended and the sorely tried heart found relief. In Macedonia Titus found him and cheered him with the joyful news that all had turned out for the best. The Corinthians had received the epistle with submission, had returned to their allegiance, were prepared to go any lengths to prove their loyalty. In the joy of his heart at this renewal of their former friendship St. Paul wrote to them an epistle—an epistle which either is, or is contained in, our Second Epistle to the Corinthians.

This somewhat hesitating phrase introduces us to the problem of the unity of that epistle. Is the epistle which St. Paul sent on this occasion co-extensive with our 2 Corinthians, or is the epistle that we know by name made

up partly of this epistle and partly of fragments of earlier epistles? The question may be defined a little more exactly by saying that there is a powerful body of first-class critical opinion which holds that the first nine chapters of our 2 Corinthians represent the epistle written on this occasion, while chapters 10-13 are a part of that earlier severe epistle about the results of which the apostle was so keenly anxious.

Before attempting to discuss this question on its merits a word may be said as to the origin and growth of it. Semler of Halle seems to have been the first critic to suggest that the epistle is composed of fragments. He was led to this by the marked contrast between chapters 1-9 on the one hand and chapters 10-13 on the other, and apparently he did not seek for further proofs. His suggestion met with little favor in Germany and was ignored elsewhere. In process of time, however, the theory he had advocated gained greater support till in 1870 there appeared a pamphlet on the *Vier-Capitel-Brief*, by Hausrath, of Heidelberg, in which the division of the epistle into two parts at the end of chapter 9 was again advocated. The suggestion was examined and dismissed by Klöpffer in 1874. By many, Klöpffer's refutation had been regarded as final and complete, but the discussion entered on a new stage by the publication, in 1897, of some articles in the *Expositor* by Dr. J. H. Kennedy, followed in 1900 by his book on *The Second and Third Epistles to the Corinthians*. There is one important difference, however, to be noted between Hausrath's theory and that of Kennedy. The former held that chapters 10-13 form the *whole* of the severe epistle written by St. Paul; the latter prefers the view that what we possess is two mutilated fragments; that chapters 10-13 are the concluding part of the earlier severe epistle of which the opening part has been lost, while chapters 1-9 are the earlier part of the epistle written on the return of Titus, and that here the concluding part has been lost.

In other words, by **design** or accident, the *end* of the earlier severe epistle has been attached to the *beginning* of the later cordial one; hence the **marked** difference in tone between the two parts of the epistle as we have it.

There seems on the whole to be an increasing tendency to accept this view. Some of those who finally reject it only do so after a careful discussion of its claims. Dr. Robertson's verdict in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible* is, that "on the whole as regards internal evidence, we may say that the case for separation is not proved, but it would be going too far to say that it is absolutely disproved." Dr. Sanday in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* decides against the separation. Among the scholars who accept Kennedy's view may be named Adeney, Bacon, König, McGiffert, Plummer and Schmiedel.

We come now to a brief examination of the question itself. And in doing this, it is necessary in the case of one particular point, not merely to note it, but to write it large in the forefront of the whole discussion. This important point is the fact that the whole case for separation rests entirely on *internal evidence*. There is not a fragment of external evidence to be adduced in its favor; on the contrary it is wholly against any such dissection of the epistle. There is no evidence that any scribe, translator or patristic writer ever knew the epistle in any other form than that in which we have it. In other words, we have no evidence from manuscript, version or patristic text that either of these alleged fragments ever had a separate existence.

What then is the internal evidence that calls for this drastic step? Is it sufficient in itself to counterbalance this entire absence of external testimony?

It will probably be more helpful for the clear understanding of the problem if the arguments for separation be stated without comment, all criticism and counter suggestion being reserved for the end.

(1) The first point is that the apostle himself de-

scribes this earlier epistle as being written "out of much affliction and anguish of heart . . . with many tears." (2 Cor. 2:4). Such a description as this would seem exaggerated if applied to our 1 Corinthians. But the whole of chapters 10-13 may well have been written in much anguish and distress of mind. The severity is unquestionable; and it must have cost the writer many a pang to speak in this strain to those whom he loved and was anxious to win back to himself.

(2) It seems almost inconceivable that St. Paul could have written such words as chapters 10-13 contain, just at this time. We have noted the intense anxiety with which he awaited the return of Titus. He himself expresses the unfeigned joy which the news of Titus brought to him. In chapters 1-9 he expresses this joy with the utmost tenderness and kindness towards his Corinthian friends. Confident in this renewed cordiality he proceeds with all delicacy and courtesy to press on them in chapters 8 and 9 the question of contribution for the poor saints at Jerusalem, and then—there is a leap into a torrent of stinging sarcasm and biting reproof. View it as we will, there is undoubtedly a very real gap. Chapters 1-9 are entirely appropriate to St. Paul's feelings when Titus returned. How chapters 10-13 could harmonize with the joyous thankfulness of his mood seems very difficult to say.

(3) There are certain passages, which, if the epistle is to be regarded as an indivisible whole, appear to be mutually contradictory. It will suffice to quote one or two as typical of a larger number. In 7:4 he says: "Great is my glorying on your behalf." In 7:16 he says: "I rejoice that in everything I am of good courage concerning you." In 8:7 he says: "Ye abound in faith and utterance and knowledge." But in 12:20, 21 he says: "I fear . . . lest by any means there should be strife, jealousy, wraths, factions, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults; lest . . . I should mourn for many

of them that have sinned heretofore, and repented not of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they committed." It seems almost inexplicable that in the course of *one* epistle, that passage of dark suspicion should follow immediately on these utterances of confidence and love. If, however, that severe passage really belongs to an earlier epistle when the relations between the apostle and his converts were strained, and the other passages belong to the later epistle when that unhappy time was over and the apostle could congratulate them on their better mood—then all is clear.

(4) We come now to a proof, which Kennedy regards as the sheet anchor of his theory. It is concerned with certain particular passages. There are expressions occurring in chapters 1-9 which *seem* to verbally refer to passages in chapters 10-13. The expressions in chapters 10-13 are in the present tense; those in chapters 1-9 are in the past tense. Standing in their present order in the epistle they seem inexplicable. But on the assumption that chapters 10-13 constitute the whole or part of the earlier severe epistle, then these backward references in the later epistle, i. e., our chapters 1-9, become perfectly clear. The force of this argument will be more easily seen if the passages in question be placed side by side:

10:6—Being in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience shall be fulfilled.	2:9—To this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you whether you are obedient in all things.
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13:2—If I come again, I will not spare.	1:23—To spare you I forbore to come to Corinth.
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13:10—I write these things while absent, that I may not when present deal sharply.	2:3—I wrote this very thing, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow.
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(5) One more line of proof may be mentioned. It is a matter of detail, but to the present writer it appears more convincing than some of the arguments hitherto adduced. The earlier severe epistle would almost certainly have been written from Ephesus. It is equally certain that the letter despatched on the arrival of Titus was written some-

where in Macedonia. Bearing these facts in mind, we note that in 10:16 the apostle speaks of his hope "to preach the gospel even unto the parts beyond you." The obvious reference of this is to Italy and Spain. Now, on the assumption that these words form part of the earlier severe epistle written from Ephesus, they are accurate and exact. Italy does lie beyond Corinth in a straight line to one writing from Ephesus. The words do not seem to be so properly used in an epistle written from Macedonia. Italy does not lie beyond Corinth to a man writing in Macedonia.

Here, then, we have the case for separation. The foregoing summary of the evidence, though brief, may claim to be fair. It remains now, to strike a balance, if possible, between these contending probabilities and improbabilities. Are all these arguments, based on the *internal* evidence, sufficient to outweigh the total absence of external evidence, or rather, one may say, the extreme improbability from the side of the *external* evidence that the epistle should be so split up?

"Extreme improbability" is not too strong a phrase; it is capable of being justified. It should be noted, in the first place that the joining of these two fragments—if it took place at all—must have done so quite early. It must have been before the time of Irenæus, because he quotes the passage 2 Cor. 12:7-9 and refers to it (the words are extant in the Latin version) as coming "in secunda quae est ad Corinthios." Kennedy suggests a date about the year 96 A. D. when Claudius Ephebus and Valerius Bito were despatched from Rome to Corinth to report on the effect of Clement's epistle to the Corinthians. The main point, however, is that it must have taken place during the "papyrus" period when books were still circulated in the roll form and not in the "codex" form. It is not uncommon to find certain business or official documents united into one roll; and there would be nothing extraordinary in one or more short epistles being joined to-

gether in the same roll. But there is by no means the same probability that a *fragment* of an epistle should be attached to a fragment of another epistle. The hypothesis is that the beginning of this second fragment (i. e., the earlier epistle) is lost. Now this brings us to a crucial question. Was the joining of these two fragments intentional or unintentional? If it was intentional, why was the opening part of the second fragment omitted? If it was done unintentionally, purely as the result of accident, then the chances are a thousand to one against the first fragment ending with a complete sentence and the second one beginning at the beginning of a sentence. The probabilities are much greater that rough edges would in some way be visible at the point of juncture.

Then again, on the hypothesis of *accident* we must suppose that this one copy, in which fragments of two separate epistles have been joined by accident, was the only one to survive, and that every trace of the two component epistles in their separate form has perished. In fact the suggestion that fragments of two epistles have been joined in this casual, unintentional way, in such fashion as to rouse no mention of it in the earliest writers is a literary phenomenon so remarkable as to be incredible.

If, on the other hand, we are to suppose that the joining of the two fragments was done of set purpose—by members of the Corinthian church, or by some other person—one can only reply that it seems incredible that any one should have deliberately taken two fragments so widely different in tone and temper, and should have welded them into one epistle; and, what is more remarkable, should have disturbed the proper sequence, putting the earlier severe document out of its proper place, *after* the later more cordial one.

External documentary evidence, then, is not merely silent. Its silence is loudly eloquent against the separation. This, however, does not end the whole debate, for

we are still left face to face with the admitted gap between chapter 9 and chapter 10. Why does St. Paul, after nine chapters of cordiality and forgiveness, pass at a stroke into a passage of severe rebuke and invective? There are one or two considerations that seem to the present writer to go a long way—if not the whole distance—towards explaining this.

In the first place, no one of these longer Pauline epistles was composed at one sitting. Such epistles as *Romans* and *1 Corinthians* must have cost the apostle and his amanuensis many a sitting of laborious work. Now there is nothing unreasonable in supposing that when St. Paul had reached the end of chapter 9, further news arrived from Corinth of disaffection in the church, due to the machinations of his Judaizing foes “the Christ party.” It has been objected to this view that there is no hint of the arrival of any additional news of this kind, while, on the other hand, there is constant mention of the good news brought by Titus. Have we not, however, a real parallel in the epistle to the Philippians? In 3:1 of that epistle the apostle is evidently just drawing to a close. Then, all at once, without a word of preliminary warning he plunges into an anti-Judaizing invective: “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, etc.” Evidently some news had come to hand at that moment of the intrigues of his Jewish enemies, which caused him to break off into his impassioned warning. May we not suppose that something similar happened in the case of the Corinthian epistle?

This hypothesis seems to be quite adequate to account for the phenomena. The severe earlier epistle, which the apostle wrote in anguish of heart, we must suppose to be lost, just like the still earlier epistle referred to in *1 Cor.* 5:9. The stern reproof of chapters 10-13 follows on the kindness of chapters 1-9 because new circumstances had occurred to evoke it. This will account, too, for the more severe passages in the latter part which seem

to contradict the more kindly sentiments of the earlier part. With reference to the particular passages quoted, 2:3 and 13:10 refer, in the opinion of the present writer, to two different epistles, just as 1:23 and 13:2 refer to two different occasions. The connection between 2:9 and 10:6 is too slight to warrant any conclusion. In face of all this, the argument that, because Italy lies beyond Corinth in a straight line from Ephesus, therefore the passage 10:6 *must* have been written from Ephesus, is precarious. It is not impossible that the apostle writing from Macedonia to Corinth, may have spoken of Italy and Spain as "the parts beyond you."

In addition to the above considerations one or two further points may be quite briefly noticed. It is a fair inference from 2 Cor. 7:8, 2:4 that there was but *one* severe epistle; and it seems highly probable that it is referred to in 2 Cor. 10:10 f. If this be so, then obviously these chapters 10-13 cannot be identified with the epistle. It is clear, too, that when the apostle wrote the severe epistle, he wrote in order to avoid the necessity of paying a visit in person (1:23); but when he wrote these last chapters he was on the point of paying a visit (12:14, 13:1). Hence his intentions at the time of writing these chapters are quite different from what he says his intentions were when he wrote the painful epistle.

These points taken in connection with the considerations previously brought forward, lead us to the conclusion that the case for the *Vier-Capitel-Brief* has not been made out. External and internal evidence combine to maintain our conviction of the integrity of the epistle.

In the foregoing discussion we have confined ourselves to the question of the last four chapters. An almost stronger case might be made out for the view that the short paragraph 6:14—7:1 is an interpolated fragment from some earlier epistle of the apostle to Corinth. It certainly seems to break into the sense of the passage, and 7:2 joins quite smoothly on to 6:13 if the paragraph

be excised. Here, too, however, the objection from the side of the external evidence is almost insuperable. While, on the other hand, the passage has so much affinity with certain parts of the context, that its presence is by no means inexplicable.

Our conclusion, therefore, about the last four chapters may be extended to the epistle as a whole. In the absence of much more convincing evidence than is at present available we retain the conviction that what we now possess is the Second Epistle to the Corinthians in the form in which it left the hands of St. Paul.