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## The Relationship between the Opposition to Paul Reflected in 2 Corinthians 1-7 and 10-13

*Last year (EQ 88:2 (1988), 129-139) we published a short essay on 'The Offender and the Offence in 2 Corinthians 2:5 and 7:12', by the author of the recent Tyndale Commentary on 2 Corinthians. The present essay is devoted to a further aspect of the background of the complicated relationships between Paul and the church at Corinth.*

The apostle Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church was never an easy one. Even when 1 Corinthians was written, the apostle appears to have been the object of some criticism in Corinth (4:18-21). However, as is well known, it is in 2 Corinthians that we find Paul making mention of overt opposition. In chapters 1-7 Paul expresses relief over a crisis *already resolved* at the time of writing (2:5-11; 7:5-13), and in chapters 10-13 he responds to a crisis *far from resolution* when he was writing (10:2, 7-12; 11:3-6, 12-15, 19-21a, 21bff.; 12:11-13).

If we adopt the view that chapters 10-13 are to be identified with the 'severe' letter (and so written *before* chapters 1-7), then we can say that the opposition *far from resolution* in chapters 10-13 is the same as that seen to have been now *already resolved* in chapters 1-7. However, if with most modern commentators we take it that chapters 10-13 were written *after* chapters 1-7 (either as part of the same letter, or as a letter sent some time later), then we have to say that there were two phases to the opposition mentioned in 2 Corinthians, i.e., that phase already resolved when chapters 1-7 were written, and that far from resolution when chapters 10-13 were written subsequently. The question then arises whether the two phases of opposition were just that, i.e., two phases of opposition emanating from the one source, or whether the opposition in fact emanated from two different sources.

Some commentators who adopt the view that chapters 10-13

were written after chapters 1–7 argue that the offender of 2:5 and 7:12 is to be identified as one of the intruders spoken of in chapters 10–13, and thus the two phases of the opposition are to be seen as emanating from the same source.<sup>1</sup> Others who adopt the same view of the chronological relationship between chapters 1–7 and 10–13 seem content to regard the opposition reflected in chapters 1–7 as emanating from some unknown person who for some unknown reason mounted a personal attack against the apostle Paul<sup>2</sup>, and in this case there is little point in asking the question about any possible relationship between this opposition and that reflected in chapters 10–13.

### The Opposition Reflected in Chapters 1–7

Elsewhere<sup>3</sup> I have argued that a good case can be made out for identifying the offender of chapters 1–7 as the incestuous person of 1 Corinthians 5, *provided that* the primary offence in view in 2 Corinthians 1–7 is not the incestuous relationship with his step-mother, but rather a personal attack mounted against the apostle Paul during the latter's 'painful' visit to Corinth. Briefly stated that case rests upon the following observations:

- (a) A general problem of immorality persisted among the members of the Corinthian church throughout the time of Paul's correspondence with it, and this would have produced an atmosphere in which the incestuous person could have opposed, rather than have submitted to, the discipline which Paul had demanded. In this way, when the apostle made his interim visit to Corinth he could well have been faced by an unrepentant offender, one who would then attack rather than submit to his authority, and who may also have questioned his integrity.
- (b) In 1 Corinthians 5:6–8, speaking of the incestuous person's sin, Paul warns his readers that 'a little leaven leavens the whole lump'. In 2 Corinthians 2:5 Paul describes the offender as one who has caused pain 'to you all'. In both places the act

<sup>1</sup> E.g. C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York, 1973), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh, 1915), 54–55; R. H. Strachan, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London, 1935), 70; F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (London, 1971), 185; R. Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis, 1985), 47–48; V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians* (New York, 1984), 168.

<sup>3</sup> 'The Offender and the Offence in 2 Corinthians 2:5 and 7:12', *EQ* 88, 1988, 129–139, and more briefly in *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Leicester, 1987), 41–45.

of the one affects the whole congregation. If we identify the offender of 2 Corinthians 2:5 with the incestuous person of 1 Corinthians 5 we are able to explain this parallelism. In the first instance, mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5, the sinful act of one member 'leavened the whole lump' in that it brought shame upon the whole church. In the second instance, mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:5, the failure of the congregation to discipline the incestuous person after his personal attack against Paul allowed the continuing presence of this unrepentant individual in the church, and that was something which caused pain to all.

- (c) There is no evidence that Paul's call for discipline of the incestuous person in 1 Corinthians 5 actually produced straightaway the action for which he hoped. It is possible then that it was only when they received Paul's 'severe' letter, after the apostle's humiliating experience at the hand of the offender (= the not yet repentant incestuous person), that the Corinthians were moved at last to effect the necessary discipline (2 Cor. 7:8-12). If this possibility be granted then the identification of the offender and the incestuous person becomes quite feasible.
- (d) In 1 Corinthians 5, where Paul called for discipline of the incestuous person, he instructed the Corinthians to hand him over to *Satan* for the destruction of the flesh. What we find in 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, as part of Paul's response to the news that the discipline had been carried out at last, is concern on the apostle's part lest the disciplined offender, now presumably repentant, be swallowed up by excessive sorrow, and in the end *Satan* may gain the advantage. These references to Satan's role in the discipline of the incestuous person on the one hand, and Paul's fear that Satan may gain the advantage if the offender was not restored to the fellowship of the church on the other, suggest that the incestuous person of 1 Corinthians 5 may be identified with the offender of 2 Corinthians 1-7.
- (e) Finally, this identification enables us to understand why an offence which caused pain to Paul as an individual should also result in injury to the Corinthian church as a whole. The personal attack of the offender against Paul accounts for the former, while the continued presence of the unrepentant incestuous person (= the offender) accounts for the latter.

If the feasibility of this identification of the opposition to Paul in 2 Corinthians 1-7 be granted, then the question arises concerning the relationship, if any, between this opposition and that found

reflected in 2 Corinthians 10–13. Before taking up this matter, which is the main concern of this article, some brief comment about the nature of the latter opposition needs to be made.

### The Opposition Reflected in Chapters 10–13

The opposition to Paul reflected in 2 Corinthians 10–13, unlike that of 2 Corinthians 1–7, emanated not from one *individual*, but from a *group* of people. Paul refers to them as 'false apostles' (11:13) and even 'servants of Satan' (11:15), and from the response he made to their criticisms, we can glean some scraps of information concerning these men, at least as Paul perceived them. They were proud to belong to Christ (10:7). They preached a gospel different from the one Paul preached (11:4), and prided themselves on their speaking ability (11:6). They presented themselves in Corinth (perhaps only initially) as those who carried out their mission on the same terms Paul had carried out his (11:12). They adopted an authoritarian stance in Corinth and succeeded in imposing their authority upon the church (11:19–21). They were proud of their Jewish ancestry and that they were servants of Christ (11:21–23). They stressed the importance of having enjoyed visionary experiences and revelations from God (12:1), and that a true apostle ought to perform signs and wonders (12:11–13). They also emphasized the need for evidence that Christ spoke through anyone who claimed to be his emissary, evidence which consisted of some display of power (13:3).

The actual identity of these people is the subject of an ongoing debate. Suggested identifications include the following: (1) representatives of a radical Jewish-Christian group associated with Peter,<sup>4</sup> (ii) Palestinian Jewish-Christians who at least laid claim to the authority of the Jerusalem apostles,<sup>5</sup> (iii) a group of Palestinian origin, but not necessarily having the authority of the Jerusalem apostles—they were intruders who joined themselves with Paul's gnostic opponents in Corinth, thus broadening the front on which Paul had to fight,<sup>6</sup> (iv) Jewish Christian gnostics,<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> F. C. Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Work, His Epistles and His Doctrine* vol. 1, ed. E. Zeller (London, 1875), 258–307; T. W. Manson, 'Paul in Ephesus (3): The Corinthian Correspondence', *BJRL* 26, 1941–42, 118.

<sup>5</sup> E. Käsemann, 'Die Legitimität des Apostel: Eine Untersuchung zu II Korinther 10–13', *ZNW* 41, 1942, 33–71.

<sup>6</sup> H. Lietzmann—W. G. Kümmel, *An die Korinther I. II* (Tübingen, 1969), 211.

<sup>7</sup> W. Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians* (Nashville, 1971), 113–116.

(v) Jews who had adopted the type of propaganda used by the inspired men of the Hellenistic world,<sup>8</sup> and (vi) Judaizing Jews from Jerusalem who misrepresented the Jerusalem apostles.<sup>9</sup> While the suggested identifications are many and varied, most recognize that Paul's opponents in chapters 10-13 were Jewish Christians of one sort or another. For the purposes of this article it is sufficient to leave it at that, seeing that our main purpose is not the exact identification of the opponents of chapters 10-13, but rather the determination of what relationship, if any, may have existed between them and the offender of chapters 1-7, and to this matter we may now turn.

### The Relationship between the Opposition in Chapters 1-7 and 10-13

If it be granted that the opposition reflected in chapters 1-7 and 10-13 emanated from different sources, the question does arise whether there was any relationship between them. Briefly stated, the thesis of this article is that the intruders of chapters 10-13 were already present in Corinth, and voicing their criticisms of Paul, when the Corinthians received Paul's letter (1 Corinthians) calling for disciplinary action against the incestuous person. These intruders were critical of Paul's apostolate and were undermining his authority. Their criticisms were taken up by the incestuous person and used as 'ammunition' in his attack against the apostle during the 'painful' visit. Paul was forced to withdraw from Corinth in humiliation, and return to Ephesus from whence he wrote his 'severe' letter calling upon the Corinthians once more to discipline the offender and, by so doing, to reaffirm their loyalty and affection to their apostle. The 'severe' letter brought Paul's converts to their senses, and they took vigorous disciplinary action against the offender and in this way they publicly acknowledged Paul's apostolic authority.

Up until this point the intruders had been content to allow the offender to confront Paul with their criticisms. But now, finding Paul fully reinstated in the Corinthians' affections, they mounted

<sup>8</sup> G. Friedrich, 'Die Gegner des Paulus im 2 Korintherbrief', *Abraham unser Vater*, eds. O. Betz, M. Hengel, P. Schmidt (Leiden, 1963), 181-215. D. Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians* (Philadelphia, 1986), 315-316.

<sup>9</sup> C. K. Barrett, 'Paul's Opponents in II Corinthians', *NTS* 17, 1971, 233-254. Cf. 'PSEUDAPOSTOLOI (2 Cor. 11:13)', *Mélanges Bibliques en Hommage au R.P. Béda Rigaux*, eds. A. Descampes, A. de Halleux (Gembloux, 1970), 377-396; 'Cephas and Corinth', *Abraham unser Vater*, 1-12.

their own attack against the apostle. Previously there had been no need to do so, seeing that the offender had taken up their criticisms and used them against Paul, so undermining the apostle's standing in the eyes of the Corinthian believers. But if their own position in Corinth was to be maintained following the disciplining of the offender and the restoration of good relations between Paul and the Corinthians, the intruders themselves would have to discredit the apostle. The various elements of that discrediting process are reflected in Paul's response to it in chapters 10–13.<sup>10</sup>

There are a number of observations which can be made in support of the feasibility of the thesis that there did exist this sort of relationship between the offender and the intruders.

(a) There is the matter of continuity and discontinuity between chapters 1–7 and chapters 10–13, especially in the use of the theme of weakness and power. In chapters 1–7 Paul speaks of the comfort he received in the midst of sufferings (1:3–11), and testifies to the fact that God continued to lead him in triumph in the midst of the many sufferings and anxieties of his mission (2:12–17). He speaks of 'treasure in earthen vessels' asserting that while he is given up to death for Jesus' sake the life of Jesus is being manifested in his mortal flesh (4:7–15), and finally he claims to have commended himself as a true servant of God in many afflictions and privations—as poor, he made many rich (6:3–10).

This same theme of weakness and power is found also in chapters 10–13, but this time with a more polemic edge, most notably in the 'fool's speech' of 11:11–12:13. It is this polemic edge which distinguishes the use of the theme in these chapters from its use in chapters 1–7, and this is in turn what is meant by the discontinuity between them. In the 'fool's speech' Paul boasts of his hardships as the proof that he is a better servant of Christ than the intruders (11:23b–33), and testifies to having received a word from the Lord to the effect that divine power is made perfect in human weakness (12:7–10).

The continuity between chapters 1–7 and 10–13, as far as

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<sup>10</sup> The elements of this discrediting included the following: they accused Paul of being bold when absent, but meek when present (10:1), and of acting in a worldly fashion (10:2); they said he wrote frightening letters but lacked a commanding presence and was an unimpressive speaker (10:9–10); they alleged that his apostolate was inferior because he was unskilled in speaking (11:5–6) and because it lacked apostolic signs (12:11–12); and they asserted that he lacked personal integrity in financial matters (12:14–18).

the use of the theme of weakness and power is concerned, can be understood satisfactorily in terms of Paul's response to the criticism of his apostolate by the offender in the first instance and by the intruders in the second. The discontinuity, seen in the sharper polemic edge to Paul's use of the theme in chapters 10-13 compared with its use in chapters 1-7, may be accounted for once we allow that the criticisms were second hand when made by the offender who was using 'ammunition' provided by others, whereas they were first hand and possibly more vicious when voiced later by the intruders who wanted to usurp Paul's apostolic standing in the church.

- (b) By postulating the existence of some relationship between the offender and the intruders we are better able to understand why the Corinthians did not defend their apostle as he expected they should have done when he was attacked by the offender (2:3). Why would the Corinthians have stood by and done nothing while their spiritual father was humiliated by the offender? We can understand how this might have happened if we postulate that the intruders were already present in Corinth voicing their criticisms of Paul when the offender mounted his personal attack against him during the apostle's interim visit to Corinth. If these intruders were already putting themselves forward as genuine apostles and implying that Paul was not, then it is understandable how any desire on the part of the Corinthians to come to Paul's aid would have been neutralized. They would have been in some confusion over the competing claims made by the intruders and Paul, and so unable to decide whom they should believe. This could well have rendered them inactive in face of the attack made by the offender against their apostle.
- (c) We can also make more sense of the reference by Paul to the demand for letters of recommendation in 3:1-3 if we understand there to have been some relationship between the attack made by the offender and the later campaign against Paul launched by the intruders. If the intruders were already present at the earlier stage, then part of their criticism of Paul would no doubt have been that he carried no letters of recommendation. Paul, then, in clearing up residual matters after the resolution of the first crisis, would feel that he must respond to this criticism which the offender had taken up and used against him. It is unlikely, on our reconstruction, that the offender, a member of the church founded by Paul, would have thought, of his own accord, to criticize the one who had founded the church on the grounds



that he did not carry letters of recommendation. On the other hand it is quite understandable that such a criticism would have been made by the intruders who themselves came from the outside, presumably bearing their letters of recommendation, and that this criticism would then have been taken up by the offender and used against Paul.

- (d) Postulating a relationship between the offender and the intruders helps us to understand the purpose of the inclusion of the *midrashim* on Exodus 34 which are found in 3:7-18. Here Paul contrasts the greater glory attaching to the ministry of the new covenant in the Spirit which he was privileged to exercise, with the lesser (but nevertheless real) glory attaching to the ministry of the old covenant associated with Moses. The intruders made much of their Jewish credentials (11:21b-22) and preached another gospel (11:4), and while it is not possible to say for sure that they were Judaizers (like those Paul attacks in Galatians), their Jewish background was obviously important to them. They may have criticized Paul because he held only loosely, as they saw it, to his own Jewish heritage. If the offender had picked up on this criticism and used it against Paul, then we can understand why Paul, in clearing up residual matters following the resolution of the first crisis, wanted to emphasize the superiority of ministry under the new covenant and neutralize such criticisms.
- (e) Finally, in 1 Corinthians 5:1 Paul refers to the incestuous person as immorality 'of a kind that is not found even among pagans' (*en tois ethnesin*, lit. 'among the Gentiles'). I am grateful to Professor I. H. Marshall for pointing out to me that this statement could imply that the incestuous person was himself a Jew. If, as I have argued, the incestuous person is to be identified with the offender of 2 Corinthians 2:5 and 7:12, then being a Jew he would have had a natural affinity with the intruders who were also Jews, as well as sharing with them a desire to see Paul discredited. All this further enhances the case for some relationship between the two.

These observations offer some support for the feasibility at least of the thesis of this article, i.e. that there was some relationship between the opposition to Paul reflected in chapters 1-7 and 10-13 of 2 Corinthians. This relationship may be understood to have arisen because the intruders of chapters 10-13 were already present in Corinth when the offender made his personal attack against Paul. By voicing their criticisms of Paul at that time the intruders provided 'ammunition' which was taken up and used by the offender when he made his attack against the apostle.