

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

ARE THE TWO EPISTLES IN 2 CORINTHIANS?

THE document which is described in our Bibles as the "Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians" has always been regarded by commentators as an especially difficult one; and among its difficulties none has been felt more strongly than the striking difference between the relation of the Apostle to the Corinthian Church revealed to us in the first nine chapters, in which he almost exhausts the resources of language in describing the fulness of his joy at their reconciliation to himself after a temporary estrangement, and the relation which appears to be revealed to us in the four concluding chapters, in which the estrangement appears to be present and not past.

More than a century ago Semler suggested that these portions did not originally belong to the same epistle. He seemed to regard the contrast between them as sufficient evidence for his theory, and did not seek for further proof; and he complicated the theory by advocating further alterations of the text, some of which he afterwards abandoned or modified. In fact he divided 2 Corinthians into three epistles: (1) 2 Corinthians i.-viii., to which he added Romans xvi. and 2 Corinthians xiii. 11 to end; (2) 2 Corinthians x. 1 to xiii. 11; (3) 2 Corinthians ix. Meyer, in his reply to this theory, endorsed the statement of Hug, that we might as well divide the *περὶ γερφάνου* of Demosthenes into two orations because the first part is calm and the second part vehement. Semler's theory did not for a long time gain much acceptance even in Germany, and in England it was completely ignored; so much was this the case that Dean Alford in his *Introduction to 2 Corinthians* acknowledged that he derived his information about the theory from Meyer's reply to it. In process of time, however, fresh advocates appeared in Germany; and in the

year 1870 Professor Hausrath, of the University of Heidelberg, published a pamphlet, entitled *Der Vier-Capitel-Brief des Paulus an die Corinthier*, in which he advocated the division of 2 Corinthians into two separate epistles; the division being made at the end of the ninth chapter. Hausrath went into more detailed proof of his theory than Semler had done; he particularised four points of difference which had arisen between St. Paul and the Corinthian Church: (1) The case of the incestuous person; (2) Suspicions about the collection for Jerusalem; (3) The announcement of St. Paul's approaching visit to Corinth and the subsequent postponement of the visit; (4) The controversy with the Judaising party there. Taking these points one by one, he claimed that he could show that chapters x.-xiii. of 2 Corinthians represent an earlier stage of the controversy than chapters x.-xiii. The treatise is marked by acuteness and ability, but in discussing each of the four heads Professor Hausrath frames hypotheses about the position of things at Corinth, and the accusations brought against the Apostle, which do not appear to me to be capable of being sufficiently established to be made in their turn the foundations of an important theory; and by far the most telling part of the reply which was made by Professor Klöpffer to the pamphlet is, in my opinion, his examination of some of these hypotheses.

Since 1870 the question has become to some extent an open one in Germany, but in England it has as yet received very slight notice; commentators, when they do not ignore it altogether, generally confining themselves to a passing reference to Klöpffer's refutation of Hausrath's treatise.

A sentence in a short introduction to an unfinished Commentary by Bishop Lightfoot, which has been published since his death, seems to me to suggest that that great scholar regarded the matter as one which should not be quite so summarily disposed of, for he classes both

Hausrath's and Klöpffer's treatises among works which will well repay examination, while at the same time he refrains from expressing any opinion on the theory or even stating it. This reserved attitude, taken in connection with his respectful mention of both the opponents, makes it probable that he suspended his judgment on the matter, and that had time and strength been spared to him he would have further investigated a subject which his words implied to be one that would repay investigation.

It was not by any of these writers that my own attention was first called to the question, but by a remark which was made in my hearing by the late Dr. Reichel, Bishop of Meath, to the effect that he was convinced that there were two epistles in 2 Corinthians, and that the last written stands before the earlier. Though I had a very high respect for his acuteness of mind and profound scholarship, I was at first strongly prejudiced against what appeared to me to be a mutilation of the Epistle; but as from time to time I closely examined the text, proofs of various kinds appeared to multiply, all converging to the same conclusion—that the epistle referred to in 2 Corinthians ii. 4 as written *ἐκ πολλῆς θλίψεως καὶ συνοχῆς καρδίας* was not our 1 Corinthians but an epistle whose closing portion we possess in chapters x.—xiii. of 2 Corinthians.

It occurred to me that if these were two separate epistles, written by the same writer, with only a short interval between them, and referring to the same circumstances seen from such very different standpoints, it was not improbable that there might be some passages in which the epistle which was written later might refer back either to the very phraseology of passages in the earlier epistle, or to the acts or purposes spoken of, or the thoughts or feelings which underlay the words of those passages.

I think that I have discovered three such pairs of

corresponding passages, and I would specially call the attention of the critical reader to the fact in each of these pairs—the act, or purpose, or feeling, which in 2 Corinthians x.–xiii. is present or future, in 2 Corinthians i.–ix. is spoken of as belonging to the past.

The first of these passages which I shall adduce is 2 Corinthians xiii. 10: “For this cause I write these things while absent that I may not when present deal sharply” *διὰ τοῦτο ταῦτα ἀπὸν γράφω, ἵνα παρὸν μὴ ἀποτόμως χρῆσωμαι.*

With this I would compare 2 Corinthians ii. 3, “And I wrote this very thing, lest when I came I should have sorrow.” *Καὶ ἔγραψα τοῦτο αὐτὸ, ἵνα μὴ ἔλθων λύπην ἔχω.* This is the very paragraph in which the Apostle is speaking of having written out of much affliction, so that unless the correspondence between the passages be merely apparent, it is a direct identification of 2 Corinthians xiii. 10 as part of the epistle referred to in 2 Corinthians ii. 4 as written *ἐκ πολλῆς θλίψεως.*

The second passage from 2 Corinthians x.–xiii. which I wish to adduce is taken from the same chapter as the last. It is 2 Corinthians xiii. 2, “If I come again, I will not spare,” *ἐὰν ἔλθω εἰς τὸ πάλιν οὐ φείσομαι.* With which I compare 2 Corinthians i. 23, “To spare you I forbore to come unto Corinth,” *φειδόμενος ὑμῶν οὐκετι ἦλθον εἰς Κόρινθον.* If “οὐκετι” here be taken in its usual meaning as equivalent to “no more,” “not again,” the parallelism of the two passages will be even clearer than it is in either the Revised or Authorised translations. That it should be thus translated can, I think, be proved, not only because this is the proper meaning of the word; whereas the rendering of our Authorised translation “Not as yet” would represent *οὐπω*; but also because St. Paul carrying on the thought in the following verse adds “But” (or “For,” which has strong manuscript authority) “I deter-

mined this for myself, that I would not come again to you with sorrow." Here there can be no doubt as to the meaning of the word *πάλλιν*. It is in fact the very word which he employed in 2 Corinthians xiii. 2.

The passages which I have quoted from, 2 Corinthians x.-xiii., are both taken from the closing chapter, and the corresponding passages from 2 Corinthians i.-ix. have been found near the opening of the epistle. This is what might have been expected *a priori* in letters standing to each other in the relation in which I contend that these epistles stand. It would in such a case be highly probable that the opening part of the later letter would contain references to the thoughts and plans which had occupied the mind of the writer when he was concluding the letter which immediately preceded it.

The next passage to which I would ask the critical reader to turn is to be found in 2 Corinthians x. 6: "Being in a readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience shall be fulfilled"; but the corresponding passage in 2 Corinthians i.-ix. is, like the two former ones, taken from the portion of the epistle where St. Paul is speaking of the letter written *ἐκ πολλῆς θλίψεως*. It will be found in 2 Corinthians ii. 9: "For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye are obedient in all things." His words imply that he is satisfied that they are now obedient in all things; and later on he expressly asserts this; for in 2 Corinthians vii. 15, 16 he says (speaking of the result of Titus's mission), "Whilst he remembereth the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling ye received him. I rejoice therefore that in everything I am of good courage concerning you." He is now so far from any longer entertaining the purpose "to avenge disobedience," that he gives the Corinthian Church a *carte blanche* in the matter of forgiveness in the very next verse to the one which

I have quoted as a parallel. "To whom ye forgive anything I forgive also." 2 Corinthians ii. 10.

These pairs of corresponding passages, important as I believe them to be, form but a portion of the mass of evidence which can be produced. The best way of giving an idea of the number of ways in which this theory can be tested will be to mention briefly some of the alterations in the opinions that are held concerning the time and place of origin of 1 and 2 Corinthians, which would necessarily follow from the establishment of the theory as I hold it.

But I must first state the theory itself more fully than I have as yet done. The thesis which I have to prove is this—That there were four epistles written by St. Paul to the Corinthian Church. The first of these is alluded to in 1 Corinthians v. 9, and is now admitted by almost all commentators to be lost. The second is our 1 Corinthians. The beginning of the third epistle and the end of the fourth are lost, having perished before the first copy of our existing texts was made—very possibly from the same cause to which we owe the destruction of the first letter. It is probable from the allusions in 2 John 12 and 3 John 13, that some at least of the epistles were written on papyrus, which is a very perishable material and could easily be destroyed by constant handling or by any one out of the many accidents to which papers are exposed. (Bishop Lightfoot in his note on the lost epistles of St. Paul to the Philippians reminds us that "on the ground of inspiration we cannot assuredly claim for the letters of the Apostle an immunity from the ravages of time, which was denied to the words of the Saviour Himself.") The part which remains to us of the third Epistle is, as I believe, contained in 2 Corinthians x.-xiii., and the fourth Epistle in 2 Corinthians i.-ix. The fourth Epistle is probably almost entire; for the

closing verses of 2 Corinthians vii. have all the appearance of being the conclusion of the discussion of the troubles which had agitated the Apostle but were now happily ended; and in the eighth chapter he passes to the topic of the Collection, which in 1 Corinthians comes at the end of all the doctrinal and disciplinary discussions, and immediately before the final messages and salutations.

How the maker of the first copy of these epistles came to unite in one the fragments of two letters cannot of course be shown with certainty; but I think we may perceive a very probable cause for his mistake. The closing portion of the fourth Epistle, which forms the ninth chapter of 2 Corinthians, refers to an approaching visit to be paid by the Apostle, while the tenth chapter also speaks of a visit. It is indeed a visit of a very different kind. There is an apparent resemblance concealing a deep-seated difference; but this is precisely the complexion of things which would be likely to mislead a copyist, and cause him to unite the two, placing the epistle which had lost its beginning after the epistle which had lost its conclusion. Once the mistake was made it would be irreparable, and would be necessarily followed by all subsequent copies. The Jews used to show their respect for sacred manuscripts in a very different way from that which would be followed by the men of the nineteenth century. We would preserve them carefully in our libraries. They used reverently to bury the papyrus or parchment lest it should ever be put to unhallowed uses; and as we know that in the earliest days the Christian Church followed in many things the customs of the Synagogue, it is probable that when a copy had been made on very superior material, the Jewish mode of sepulture would be the fate of the old and tattered pieces of papyrus which we would have looked on as so priceless.

This is an outline of the theory, and I will now state briefly its necessary consequences. If it be true, 2 Corin-

thians x.-xiii. must have been written from Ephesus, not from Macedonia; 1 Corinthians cannot be the Epistle referred to in 2 Corinthians ii. 3; and, furthermore, it must have been written at a longer interval before the departure of the Apostle from Ephesus than has been generally supposed hitherto. It is scarcely possible that a false theory, which necessitated such various changes, would not expose itself to conclusive refutation under some of these heads; and it is still more unlikely that there could possibly be an apparently strong confirmation under every one of them, if the theory were really false and the changes were aberrations from the true point of view. I hope to be able to show that there is so strong a confirmation of the theory derived from each of these separate and distinct means of testing it, as is incompatible with the falsehood of the theory itself.

J. H. KENNEDY.