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The Correspondence of Paul and the Church at Corinth

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THE CORRESPONDENCE OF PAUL
AND THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

A Thesis Presented to
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary
Department of New Testament Theology

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Divinity

by
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Preface

The subject of Biblical criticism is regarded with the least of the Bible and the history. It involves those principles and operations which enable the reader to detect and judge correctly, to decide upon the genuineness of disputed writings, to obtain the original words of inspiration, and to determine the historical setting.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	iii
Introduction	1
I. News from Corinth	4
II. The "Previous" Letter	10
III. First Corinthians	22
IV. Hypotheses	28
V. Second Corinthians	37
VI. Conclusion	45

Preface

The science of Biblical criticism is occupied with the text of the Bible and its history. It involves those principles and operations which enable the reader to detect and remove corruption, to decide upon the genuineness of disputed writings, to obtain the original words of inspiration, and to understand the writings in their historical setting. The object of such criticism is to ascertain the purity or corruption of the text, to judge whether any alterations have been made, to restore the original readings that have been misplaced or replaced, and to furnish the needed historical information.

Various schools have arisen in the field of Biblical criticism. Some of them, especially the Rationalists, the Liberals, and the men of the Tuebingen school, have attacked the Bible and the text of the Bible from various angles and have proposed interesting and challenging theories. The topic discussed in the following pages is an example of such attack and theory-making.

On the surface it would seem that these men are seriously occupied with an attempt to establish the pure teaching of God's Word. But the more one studies their hypotheses and weighs the evidence which is advanced in support of their hypotheses, the more one is convinced that their interest is solely historical and that their efforts often result in attacks on the authority of the Bible as God's Holy Word.

The subject with which this thesis deals is not an article of faith. The problem is not doctrinal. But it remains for him who would search out the Scriptures to study these theories carefully, to come to very definite conclusions, and to be able to take his stand against all efforts to undermine confidence in Holy Writ. The theories are tempting; let the pastor beware!

The writer wishes to acknowledge the adviscry assistance of Dr. William Arndt, who gave of his time and interest toward the completion of this paper. It should be stated, too, that the dissertation leans heavily on James Moffat, whose work in the field of New Testament Introduction was the chief source for the hypotheses of modern critics, and on R.C.H. Lenski, whose work was the chief source for the conservative view.

Introduction

This was Corinth. Here a Church was to be planted - a peculiar people, an holy nation. The apostle Paul had been imprisoned at Philippi, found no rest in either Thessalonica or Borea, and had experienced bitter disappointment at Athens. His eyes turned to Corinth, forty-five miles to the west on the peninsula of Morea, known in classical history as the Peloponnesus. As he drew nearer, Paul saw the cone-shaped Acrocorinthus, crowned by the Temple of Venus - a towering symbol of Corinthians' idolatry in its grossest form. What could he achieve here?

Yes, this was a city, this Corinth! When Greece first fell under the Roman yoke, Corinth had joined the Achaean League and had participated in the revolt. As a result it was utterly destroyed by Consul Mummius in the year 146 B.C. For a century it lay in ruin until Julius Caesar recognized its commercial importance and planted a Roman colony there. In the next century it grew rapidly, and by the time of Paul it had reached its former eminence. This was a city of commerce, an impregnable fortress by reason of its geographic situation and its double harbor of Cenchrea on the east and Lecheum on the west. This was a city of money; and where money comes easily, vice comes more easily. These people were traders, money-getters, interested only in amassing a fortune with as little education, culture, and time as possible. They were pleasure-mad, drunken with lust as well as wine.

To this city came the apostle Paul, miserably poor and lonely. His task here was to sow the seed of the Gospel. He was sure to meet calloused, frivolous, and selfish hearts. He would have to lift people from great depths to which they had fallen. Discouraging conditions indeed, but not to Paul. He believed in Christ; that was quite enough. He believed that each of these people was looking for something different from what he was getting, and it was his purpose to give it to them.¹

Paul's first acquaintances in Corinth were Aquila and Priscilla, lately expelled from Rome. Paul and Aquila, both tent-makers by trade, lived under one roof and labored at the same trade. Paul was in want, but not only that. In such a place as Corinth he would be dependent on no man. And so he labored with his own hands at his temporal occupation. But on each Sabbath he entered into the Jewish Synagogue and there carried out his spiritual mission as best as possible. Only a few converts were made, and these Paul baptized with his own hands in the absence of his companions, Silas and Timothy, who had remained behind at Borea.

Eventually Paul's loneliness was healed by the arrival of Silas and Timothy. He was cheered and encouraged, filled with a new zeal. And he testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 18,5). Then the break came. The Jews in Corinth broke forth in open rebellion against this teaching of Paul, even as the Jews in other cities had done. From this

1. H.R. Haweis, The Picture of Paul (The Disciple), p. 123.

time forth Paul conducted his services in the house of Justus, a proselyte. A vision of the Lord told the missionary, "I have much people in this city. Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace."² A Church was established - "A difficult heterogenous Church in good sooth - a living church - a strong church, troublesome, self-willed - like a flock of sheep, all disposed to run different ways, giving the shepherd and his watchdog much anxiety."³

The Church at Corinth was gathered from all walks of life. There was Crispus, the ruler of the Synagogue who had remained with Paul after the break with the Jews. There was Justus, a citizen of good report, Erastus, the chief chamberlain of the city, and Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, slaves of humblest mien. And there were the women, pure and humble. These were the first-fruits of Achaia who formed the back-bone of Paul's beloved congregation. But it was to be only after serious troubles and dissensions that Paul could enjoy peace of mind in his relationships in this city. For eighteen months he labored there, during which time there was no end of trouble. And later, after he had departed for Ephesus, more grief was to come to him. Around this his correspondence centers.

His concern for the flock and the conditions as they existed in Corinth are basic in understanding the problem of Paul's correspondence with this people. His associations with Achaia might read like a novel.

2. Acts 18,9.10.

3. Hawsis, op. cit., p. 129.

Chapter I

News From Corinth

In the Canon of the New Testament are found two letters of the apostle Paul to the Church at Corinth. It is the opinion of many modern critics that these two letters form only a small part of a correspondence between Paul and the Corinthian Church which was carried on over a long period of time. These two letters, together with the account given by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, form the basis for our study of Paul's relationship with the Achaians. But from a study of the epistles which are recorded in the New Testament Canon it becomes quite apparent that the account given by Luke omits both minor and important details in the life of Paul. There is no mention in the Acts of the writing of the apostle's letters, nor of any of the correspondence which may have passed between the established congregations and those who had grounded them in the faith. Hence, we are compelled to go to the epistles themselves for any clues which may be hidden in the personal references of Paul.

Paul was at Ephesus for a period of three years, beginning in the year 52 and lasting till Pentecost of 55. There are variant opinions regarding these dates, but it is not our purpose here to delve into Pauline chronology, a subject which is an extensive study in itself. Ephesus lay due east of Corinth, a distance of 250 miles and a three day journey at 4 m.p.h. separating the two cities. A journey of three days at that time was comparatively short, and where there was such regard

for the apostle on the part of the Corinthians and such regard for the Corinthians on the part of the apostle, it is neither impossible nor improbable that Paul would maintain close contact with Achaia

There were several sources from which Paul was able to obtain information regarding the conditions in the congregation across the Aegean. In the first place, he had probably been well informed by Apollos, who had continued the work of Paul in that city and watered the seeds of a Christian Church which the apostle had planted. Apollos had left Corinth and was in Ephesus with Paul, for we read Paul's mention of him in I Corinthians 16,12. To attempt an understanding of Apollos' leaving would only be making conjectures, but it may have been that Apollos himself perceived the divisions which were arising and of which Paul speaks in I Corinthians 1 and 3, and that he thought it expedient to nip the unfortunate development in the bud.

Secondly, Paul had heard news from Corinth through certain ones which were of the household of Chloe (I Corinthians 1,12). Whether these were servants or members of Chloe's immediate family is unknown. But Chloe herself was one well known to the Corinthians, either because she was a resident of Ephesus who had spent considerable time in the Christian gatherings at Corinth, or because she was a resident of Corinth. In any event, Paul refers to these members of Chloe's household as trustworthy witnesses to the factions of which he speaks. It

is hardly likely that Paul would have regarded their report with any concern if Chloe had been from among the Corinthians, for her representatives would then have appeared as prejudiced witnesses in the matter.¹

Thirdly, Paul was apparently in touch with what we would today call the "grape-vine." In I Corinthians 5,1 he states, "It is commonly reported that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife." A great sin was prevalent within the very ranks of the congregation, and such a sin as would very likely be spoken of quite generally. We understand well how the news of such a sin is spread by word of mouth in our present day, and it is not at all unlikely that the news of this impurity had gone out to other congregations and was rapidly becoming a favorite topic of conversation.

And finally, but of most importance in this discussion, Paul had received news from Corinth through the slaves, Fortunatus, Stephanas, and Achaicus, who had brought a letter from the Corinthians in which the congregation laid their problems before the apostle. There are a few scholars who would separate the letter from the slaves and bring them to Ephesus at a different time. But it is hard to reason why the slaves would be sent to Ephesus unless they were in possession of this special document, the delivery of which was their special mission. It was probably written by the officials of -----

1. W.M. Ramsay, "Historical Commentary on the Epistles to the Corinthians," The Expositor, Vol. 1, Ser. 6, p. 104.

the congregation, since there is no indication that there was as yet a single Episkopos, and later submitted to the entire congregation as a matter of form for approval.

The fact of the letter written by the Corinthians is accepted with few exceptions, also by those who maintain the older view of two Pauline letters to Corinth. Surely Paul could be no plainer than when he writes in I Corinthians 7,1, "Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me." Here it is definitely stated that the Corinthians had written a letter to the founder of their congregation. Paul uses *περὶ* to indicate that he is taking up those things about which his people had asked. It is used again in 8,1; 12,1; 16,1 and 16,12, in each case to introduce a section in which Paul answers a question which had been addressed to him. Thus, this canonical letter, known to us as First Corinthians, betrays manifold allusions to a lost letter to Paul. As we read I Corinthians in the light of this suggestion, it becomes more and more apparent that our I Corinthians is a reply to a veritable question-box which was presented to the absent pastor. To read I Corinthians is to listen to one party of two engaged in a conversation, and we can only guess what the other party must have said.²

The Reverend Professor George Findlay has made an interesting attempt to reconstruct the Corinthian letter on the basis of Paul's letter. He would imagine it to be somewhat

2. Geo. G. Findlay, "The Letter of the Corinthian Church to Paul," The Expositor, Vol. 1, Ser. 6, p. 401.

prosaic and verbose in style, since it came from a church that thought itself quite elevated in word and knowledge. He goes on to characterize it as "Self-complacent and high-sounding, not to say pretentious, in its religious tone . . . making strong declarations of fidelity."³ Apparently the letter failed to make any mention of the dissensions and the criminal case of chapter five, for Paul hears of both of these from other sources. And it is not till he has discussed these matters that he proceeds to reply to the letter from Corinth. Information concerning these enormities and disorders came to him from other quarters than from the Corinthians themselves. These irregularities, the blame of which they all shared, were not mentioned in their address to Paul. The contentiousness, the incestuous marriage, the litigation, the irregularities in the celebration of the Lord's Supper - all these received not a syllable of attention. And it is wholly natural that they should thus conceal their faults from the apostle.⁴

But there are five matters concerning which the Corinthians would appreciate further knowledge. These same are indicated to us by the latter half of I Corinthians, for there Paul gives his answer to those five points. The first is taken up in chapter seven and dealt with the marriage problems which presented themselves in such a licentious city as Corinth. The second problem regarded the eating of meat offered to idols, and is answered in the eighth chapter of Paul's letter. The

3. Ibid.

4. William Paley, Horae Paulinae, p. 45.

third was the problem of the spiritual gifts; the fourth concerned the collection for the saints at Jerusalem; and finally, the Corinthians apparently had asked that Paul send Apollos back to them. It is interesting to read Findlay's reconstructed letter. Below we quote a few of the pertinent parts.

"The assembly of the Christians in Corinth to Paul, the apostle of Jesus Christ, greeting.

"Gathered together in the name of the Lord Jesus, we salute thee in love, remembering thee in our prayers continually. We acknowledge thee always in all thankfulness as the apostle of Christ unto us, and our father in Him; for we are indeed thy work in the Lord . . .

"We received thy letter of admonition with heedfulness and godly fear. . . Thou biddest us separate ourselves from the unclean and have no fellowship with those who live in the sins of the Gentiles. Are we to take this injunction in its unrestricted sense? Our city, as thou well knowest, teems with impurities. If we may not in anywise mix with transgressors, we must depart from Corinth - nay, we doubt whether in the whole world we should find any spot where men dwell that is clear of defilement . . .

"Is the single or the married state worthiest and fittest for a Christian - especially for ourselves, situated as we are at Corinth? . . .

"We are perplexed about the eating of 'idolothyta.' We all have knowledge in this matter, understanding, since we have turned to the living God, that the idol is a vain thing and cannot pollute the creatures offered to it. . . But again we ask, what is thy judgment touching this thing, and how wouldst thou have us act?

"Once more, we wish to inquire about the workings of the Spirit. We need some test to distinguish His genuine inspirations. . .

"Mayest thou, by the mercy of God, be strengthened in body, and be comforted in heart in regard both to us and to all thy disciples in the Lord. Our love be with thee in Christ Jesus. Farewell."⁵

This effort at reconstruction falls far short of verisimilitude, but in a measure it serves to give dramatic form

5. Findlay, op. cit., pp. 401-407.

Chapter II

to the situation and the relations between the Corinthian congregation and its founder.

Now for the critics are agreed - agreed at least as to the fact of the Corinthian letter to Paul, though there is some divergent opinion regarding its contents. But now we step to the threshold of that phase of Paul's Corinthian correspondence which has prompted such writing and variant opinions. According to the sequence of events, Paul returned to Antioch after his eighteen months in Corinth and then began his third great missionary journey, locating for some time in Ephesus on the coast of Asia Minor. Apollos, who had watered where Paul had planted, apparently left Corinth and joined Paul in Ephesus, for mention is made of him in I Corinthians 16,17. He undoubtedly brought news concerning the Corinthian situation, but beyond that Paul also received news through the sources enumerated in chapter one. It was in answer to the Corinthian letter that Paul penned what is known to us as His First Epistle to the Corinthians.

However, because of Paul's statement in I Corinthians 5,9, the question arises whether or not our canonical I Corinthians is actually the first letter addressed to the group in Achaia. At first glance it would appear that another letter was written somewhere during the course of events listed above, a letter which has been lost to us. But upon further investigation it may be noted that there is room for difference of opinion. Evidence has been advanced to support both views, but before we

Chapter II

The Previous Letter

Thus far the critics are agreed - agreed at least as to the fact of the Corinthian letter to Paul, though there is some divergent opinion regarding its contents. But now we step to the threshold of that phase of Paul's Corinthian correspondence which has prompted much writing and variant opinions. According to the sequence of events, Paul returned to Antioch after his eighteen months in Corinth and then began his third great missionary journey, locating for some time in Ephesus on the coast of Asia Minor. Apollos, who had watered where Paul had planted, apparently left Corinth and joined Paul in Ephesus, for mention is made of him in I Corinthians 16,12. He undoubtedly brought news concerning the Corinthian situation, but beyond that Paul also received news through the sources enumerated in chapter one. It was in answer to the Corinthian letter that Paul penned what is known to us as his First Epistle to the Corinthians.

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can weigh the evidence presented, it is necessary to examine the validity of assuming a lost letter.

Is it wrong to assume that letters written by the apostles may have been lost? Alford, in his commentary on the letters to the Corinthians, regards it as a preconceived idea, wholly unwarranted, to suppose it out of harmony with Scriptural teaching, especially on inspiration, if we assume a lost letter.¹ For example, the letter sent with Tychicus to his master, Philemon, is only one of a class of letters which must have been numerous. Paul had apparently been in the habit of writing such letters to individuals or congregations, for again in I Corinthians 16,3 he mentions his intentions of giving commendatory letters, if necessary, to those who would bear the collection to Jerusalem for Palestinian relief. Barnes views the problem specifically from the standpoint of inspiration.² Shall we suppose that God would suffer the divinely inspired writings to be lost? In answer it may first be stated that there is no evidence for the inspiration of such lost letters. It is not necessarily true that the apostles were divinely inspired in all that they wrote or spoke. On the other hand, the fact that a letter is lost does not in any way militate against the inspiration thereof. Large portions of the discourses of the disciples and even of the Savior Himself have been lost.³ Yes, rather, Scripture itself testifies that all

1. Henry Alford, The Greek Testament, II, p. 51.

2. Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament, V, p. 89.

3. John 21,25.

truth which is necessary for our salvation is in our hands, and letters which may have been lost probably served their purpose and were permitted to be lost by the divine plan. In view of all the efforts made to destroy the inspired books which we have in our possession, we should rather be grateful that they have been preserved to us than grieve over the loss of a few which pertained only to local and unimportant matters as far as our soul salvation is concerned. So also Calvin speaks: "The epistle of which he here speaks (I Corinthians 5, 9) is not now extant. Nor is it to be doubted that many others have perished; but it is sufficient for us that these remain which the Lord saw to be needful."⁴ And Lenski, "Yet we have no reason to assume on this account that the New Testament Canon is incomplete, or that the doctrine of inspiration is in any way affected. God's providence did not consider it necessary to preserve this letter to us, and that suffices entirely."⁵

We return then to the problem before us. There are several specific points to which reference is made, pro and con, in regard to the lost-letter view. Arguments have been advanced on the basis of grammatical construction, literary style, and from the historical point of view. Critics who examine the problem from either of the two points of view present their arguments in conclusive and convincing style, but when the evidence as presented by one of opposing views is

4. Barnes, loc. cit.

5. R.C.H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 228.

also presented, the problem becomes real and the final verdict must remain to individual judgment. We shall list the arguments, weigh them, and draw our conclusions on the question which is the safer ground.

The Corinthians have written a letter to Paul, and in answering, the apostle, so it is maintained, refers to a letter which he had written previously. The argument centers around Paul's statement in 5,9, ἔγραψα ὑμῖν ἐν τῇ ἐπιστολῇ, which in translation reads, "I wrote unto you in an epistle." If we but glance at these words superficially, our immediate conclusion must be that the apostle had actually written a previous letter to Corinth. But the problem is not that easily solved.

Defenders of the two-letter theory agree that ἔγραψα may be taken as the epistolary aorist, and a parallel in I Corinthians 9,15 is referred to. They would thus refer this phrase to the letter which Paul is now writing, making him say in effect, "I have written to you already in this letter which I am now writing." However, the context does not allow the epistolary aorist. According to context, 9,15 and 5,9 are not parallels. Instead, a parallel may be found in II Corinthians 7,8 where with this very phrase Paul also refers to a previous letter. It is, therefore, quite impossible that this phrase should refer to the letter in which Paul was then engaged in writing. It is his purpose here and in the succeeding verses to correct a perversion of an admonition which he had given his flock in a previous letter. Would the Corinthians twist and misunderstand

a sentence of this letter before they had received it? Can we assume that Paul is afraid of a misunderstanding arising after they had received the letter, and that therefore he is warding off the danger here? Hardly so, for as we shall see later, nowhere in this present epistle thus far completed is such a warning found as is here given. The conclusion then must be that one of Paul's letters has been lost.⁶

Again, the conservative defenders of some schools prefer to delete the phrase ἐν τῇ ἐπιστολῇ.⁷ But Moffat answers that for us by saying that such deletion is "Justified neither by considerations of rhythm nor by the apparent absence of the text from Chrysostom."⁸ Still others maintain that if the apostle Paul were referring to a former letter, he would have written ἡ παλαιά.⁹ To this, however, it may be said that if Paul were referring to the present epistle, he could also have explicitly stated so with the phrase ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ἐπιστολῇ.¹⁰ Hence, one claim balances the other. But in this same vein, the conservative school has advanced the argument that it is wholly in accord with Paul's practice to use nothing more than the article in the sense of "this." Further evidence for that view is found in Colossians 4,16: "And when THIS epistle is read among you" (τῇ ἐπιστολῇ); or again in I Thessalonians 5,27: "I charge you . . . that THIS epistle (τὴν ἐπιστολὴν) be read."¹¹

6. Ibid.

7. James Moffat, An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament, p. 111.

8. Ibid.

9. John M'Clintock and James Strong, Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, II, p. 511.

10. Moffat, loc. cit.

11. M'Clintock and Strong, loc. cit.

Thus the balances for the first time lean toward the conservative view, but it may be added here that this is the only evidence on the side of conservatism which is without refutation.

It was stated before that nowhere in the portion of the present epistle thus far completed is there a warning not to associate with fornicators. Nor is there anything that can possibly be construed as an equivalent to such a command. However, the claim that the conservatives have failed to bring forth a passage to which 5,9 might refer is without basis, for M'Clintock and Strong have, with others, pointed to the verses of chapter 5 immediately preceding the passage in question.¹² It is maintained that the apostle Paul had really, in this epistle, given the prohibition to which he refers, viz. verses 2 and 6. His purpose in the succeeding verses, then, is to explain that prohibition so as to preclude the possibility of the Corinthians interpreting it as referring to anything else than that they should not mingle with immoral persons in the congregation. Can this evidence stand unrefuted? It seems a forced reference to make 5,9 allude to the preceding verses. Paul has commanded the Corinthians to remove an incestuous person. At first glance that would seem identical with the command of 5,9. However, the command not to associate with the immoral is not a general one in 5,1-8 as it is in 5,9. The light of verses 10 and 11 serves to clear the problem, for there Paul makes explanation of the admonition which he had previously sent to the Corinthians

12. Ibid.

and the admonition which he now gives. The Corinthians had understood Paul to mean any and all fornicators, any and everywhere. "Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters, for then must ye needs go out of this world" (I Corinthians 5,10). In view of such a weighty injunction, the congregation regarded it as an impossible requirement, and so discarded it entirely. They failed, then, to cast out fornicators even from their own midst. Therefore, in verse 11 Paul makes the distinction between the epistle which he is now writing and the epistle which he has written previously. He gave a commandment. The Corinthians misunderstood. And now Paul explains himself, saying, "But now I have written unto you." This is an expression which hardly would have been used had verse 9 referred to the same epistle. "If anyone doubted the purport the former letter carried, it shall be impossible to mistake my meaning now." This is the temporal sense of νῦν. The conservative critics reject this temporal sense and prefer the logical. They would say, "But now - after this, or as it now appears - you must understand that I wrote." Thus they would have Paul denote not what he writes to them now as opposed to what he has written before, but what he actually wrote as opposed to their misconstruction of it. Ἐπειδή would then be made a repetition of the former ἐπειδή.¹³ This latter rendition, however, is difficult and forced, whereas the temporal sense is more

13. G.G. Findlay, The Expositor's Greek Testament, II, p. 812.

natural and more fitted to the entire context. Similar uses of ἡμεῖς δὲ may be found in II Corinthians 8,11 and Ephesians 2,13.

An argument from logic is next adduced to defend the two-letter view. Would it not be strange that the apostle Paul should refer only in this brief and cursory manner to such an important circumstance as his having already spoken to them concerning this sinful practice? Paul is expected to have gone to some lengths in reminding them that he had already written on this point. But the manner of Paul is wholly natural and often paralleled in modern correspondence and in pulpit sermons.

Again, the argument is raised against the lost-letter view that this supposed lost epistle is not referred to in the records of the primitive Church. In Pearson's Annals of St. Paul there is an interesting quotation from Whitby. "No father ever ascribed to Paul more than fourteen letters in all, including the letter to the Hebrews. Eusebius, in enumerating the true, uncontroverted, and spurious epistles under Paul's name makes no mention of a third letter to the Corinthians. No Christian writer ever cited from this supposed epistle, and while the epistle to Laodicea is cited by St. Jerome as an exploded book, and while the acts of St. Paul are cited and rejected by Origen and Eusebius, yet none of them make any mention of more than two epistles to the Corinthians."¹⁴ But in contrast to this,

14. Bishop Pearson, Annals of St. Paul, p. 58.

it is altogether probable that Paul wrote more letters than the fourteen which remain to us today. He labored for many years, had founded many congregations, and surely often found occasion to write to them. It is not at all unlikely that some of these letters may have been lost, for even in the Old Testament we know of books which have been lost and which were regarded as having authority by inspired men. The books of Jasher and of Iddo the Seer have been advanced as examples.¹⁵ Furthermore, regarding the lack of reference to this letter, the proponents of the lost-letter theory are agreed that the date at which this letter was lost can not be determined. It may well have been that the Corinthians discarded the letter immediately, having regarded its contents as preposterous and impossible.

There remain several other opinions with regard to the lost letter. One view proposes that Paul began or actually did write a previous letter, but that it was never sent out because of further news coming from Corinth through the slaves which shed new light on the matter and necessitated re-writing.¹⁶ Another theory suggests that the whole passage is a postscript or a note which was inserted after the entire epistle had been written.¹⁷ And still another theory proposes that this passage refers to Hebrews, a theory resting solely on a fancied resemblance of this command to that of Hebrews 12,16.¹⁸ But the human imagination may frame peculiar ideas. These views are

15. Barnes, loc. cit.

16. Thomas Hartwell Horne, An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scripture, II, p. 335.

17. Alford, op. cit., p. 509.

18. Ibid., p. 51.

the result of pure conjecture.

In the main, then, the evidence rests in favor of a "previous" letter. Modern commentators are leaning more and more to the lost-letter view. M'Clintock and Strong take their stand against that view along with Chrysostom, Theodoret, and Fabricius. But the majority follow Calvin, Beza, Grotius, and Witsius. Alford, Horne, Lenski, Olshausen, Barnes, Kretzmann and a host of collaborators join Moffat and Goodspeed in accepting the "fact" of this lost letter, although their ways separate on theories regarding other lost letters. Indeed, it is the most natural and obvious interpretation, one that would strike the great mass of men. The expression of I Corinthians 5,9 is just such an expression as Paul would have used had he written the former letter.¹⁹ And the expression of II Corinthians 10,10.11 at least corroborates the view that I Corinthians was not the only letter which Paul had written to the local congregation. Surely as we examine the possible contents of the lost letter, we must conclude that it could well be numbered with the Ῥαπιστὰ καὶ ἰβυραῖοι ἐπισητάει.²⁰

What are the data of Paul's "previous" letter? When and why the letter was written remains a matter of conjecture. It was penned sometime between Acts 18,18 and the sending of I Corinthians, but the exact time cannot be ascertained. It has been suggested²¹ that this letter was one committed to Timothy,²²

19. Barnes, loc. cit.

20. Moffat, loc. cit.

21. Alford, op. cit., p. 509.

22. See I Corinthians 4,17.

but this could not be so, for Timothy was not coming to them until after they had received I Corinthians. Thus the Corinthians would not have comprehended Paul's meaning. It is more likely that it was dispatched with Titus, though this, too, cannot be accurately determined. In any event, the letter was soon lost or discarded, for Clement of Rome knows nothing of it, nor do any of the other fathers. Modern criticism has attempted to find the letter embodied in II Corinthians, but of this we shall speak later under the unity of II Corinthians.

The letter contained a command, μὴ συναναμίχνησθε ἑαυτοῖς. This order had been misinterpreted by the Corinthians and taken in too strict a sense. We cannot doubt but that Paul was deeply moved and agitated by the news of this incestuous and immoral conduct which was being resumed in Corinth, and that he wrote in terse and commanding tones in reprimanding them. It was perhaps quite easy to misinterpret the injuncture. But beyond this there were apparently other brief notes which Paul added. In I Corinthians 16,1 we find that the Corinthians wanted directions as to the method of making the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. When was that collection enjoined and how? If Paul suggested the collection in person during a stay or trip to Corinth, would not the people have asked for explicit directions at that time? Evidently that letter contained this request also. And a third subject which he apparently discussed was his immediate future or his plan for visiting the Church at Corinth. The plan included a visit

on his way to Macedonia and again on his return from Macedonia (II Corinthians 1,15.16). Because these plans were later changed, Paul indicated, as the Corinthians claimed, that he was one of irresolute conduct and of unstable character.

Before proceeding to a discussion of Paul's next letter to his Corinthian congregation, a summary of events is in place. Paul was in Ephesus. By degrees the news came to him that his people in Achaia were slowly drifting back into their former vices. Alford and others infer from II Corinthians 12,20.21 and 13,1 that he made a quick journey to Corinth in order to correct those abuses. Still others hold that this coming meant by letter²⁴ or that the passage should be interpreted as meaning that this was the third time Paul was ready to come to them. It is quite evident that the correction in that interpretation lies in the fact of a disciplinary journey before the writing of canonical I Corinthians, as we shall see when we discuss this matter in connection with the critical hypotheses. But in any event, Paul penned a letter in response to the news which had come from Corinth. Further news of party strife then reached him, and Timothy and Erastus were dispatched by way of Macedonia to set the troubled house in order. But before they arrived, the slaves came to Paul with the letter from the Corinthians. Thus far we have come.

24. Alford, loc. cit.

Chapter III

First Corinthians

Paul's first canonical epistle to the Corinthians was occasioned in a twofold manner. In the first place, he had received news, while at Ephesus, from some members of the household of Chloe, from Apollos, and from general report concerning the disorders at Corinth. There were schisms and notorious scandals at Corinth. Impurity, incest, covetousness, litigation, and idolatry were prevalent within the very ranks of this Christian congregation. There was want of decorum in public worship, gross profanation of the Lord's Supper, and even false doctrine concerning the resurrection and the life eternal. Secondly, Paul had received a letter from Corinth through the slaves in which the members there confidently begged their leader's advice in matters of marriage, things sacrificed to idols, spiritual gifts, and concerning the collection for the saints in Jerusalem.

Herein, then, lies the purpose of Paul in writing this letter to his congregation. He would apply suitable remedies for the abuses and disorders of his congregation, and at the same time he would answer satisfactorily on all the points concerning which they had asked. His theology, both doctrinal and practical, his literary style and command of the language, his aptitude as a thorough-going shepherd of the flock - these have been the subjects of endless commentaries already written on the two letters found in the New Testament canon. It shall

suffice our purposes here to quote the characterization of this epistle as given by Wm. Taylor.

"It is truly a glorious epistle, standing before us in its mingled majesty and simplicity, like some Alpine range whose peaks seem to pierce the sky while round its base the pine forest waves in the breeze, and the wild flowers exhale their fragrance. There is rugged sternness of reproof, shaded by the verdure of affection. . . . His hymn on charity and argument on the resurrection are like great sunlit pinnacles rising up in purity and repose, and seeming to belong more to heaven than to earth."¹

The genuineness of I Corinthians has never been seriously attacked. "It would be a hard-boiled critic today who would dare deny the genuineness of I Corinthians. The Dutch wild-man, Van Manen, did indeed deny the genuineness by arguing that Paul wrote no epistles, if indeed he ever lived. Such intellectual banality is well answered by Whateley's Historic Doubts about Napoleon Bonaparte which was so well done that some readers were actually convinced that no such man ever existed, but is the product of myth and legend."² Yes, even Baur acknowledged the genuineness of these Corinthian letters. But Van Manen does not stand alone in his attacks. There are many more ultra-radical minds who have begun to cut up the text of these canonical letters either to recover one or more of the lost letters or to rearrange and reconstruct the letters altogether. Eventually we have no letters left to interpret.³ The evenness of style and epistolary stamp are well marked, but

1. William Taylor, Paul the Missionary, p. 317.

2. A.T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, IV, p.65.

3. Lenski, op. cit., p. 16.

despite that fact, some critics have come up with drastic hypotheses to the contrary. See what Hagge has done with this perfectly ordered letter.⁴ He has distinguished three epistles in the following manner:

- A. 1,1-18; 11,2-34; 7,1-8,13; 9,19-11,1; 12-14; 16,1-9; 4,16-20; 16,10-21.24.
- B. 1,9-4,15.21; II Co 10,1-11,4; I Co 15; II Co 11,5b; I Co 9,1-18; II Co 11,7-12,21; I Co 5-6; II Co 13,1-10; I Co 16,22ff.
- C. II Co 1-7.9; 13,11-13.

And as though this has not been enough cutting, he makes II Corinthians 8 a separate note written by some Macedonian church along with Paul. Völter and J. Weis are also quoted by Moffat as having done similar "splicing."⁵ Moffat admits readily that wholesale theories such as these hardly merit even a bare chronicle, but at the same time he makes allowances for interpolations which may possibly have come in from marginal notes or through insertions by editors for purposes of style.⁶ Here Moffat also oversteps the mark.

The testimony behind the letter of I Corinthians is abundant. Clement of Rome wrote to the Corinthians, ἀναλαμβάνετε τὴν ἐπιπέτατον τοῦ μακαρίου Παύλου τοῦ ἀποστόλου εἰς πρῶτον ὑμῶν ἐν ἀρχῇ εὐαγγελίου ἔγραψε; ἐν ἀληθείᾳ πνευματικῶν ἐπέσειλεν ὑμῶν. περὶ αὐτῶν τε καὶ ἑκπὴ καὶ Παύλος διὰ τὴ καὶ τότε παρακλήσει ὑμᾶς παραγγέλου.⁷ Similar testimony can be found in Polycarp's works, the works of Athenagoras, Clement, and Tertullian.⁸

4. Moffat, op. cit., p. 113.

5. Ibid.

8. These quotations taken from Alford, op. cit., p. 46.

6. Ibid.

7. Cp. I Corinthians 1,10f.

Now concerning the internal testimony of the letter, we need hardly set about to illustrate phrases which are typically Pauline in order to prove the genuineness. However, lest there be any dispute regarding the authenticity of the epistle, William Paley has gone to great lengths in his Horae Paulinae to "Evince the truth of the Scripture history of St. Paul by comparing his epistles with one another and with the Acts of the Apostles." It is interesting to note his method in thus bringing evidence for the authenticity. Two examples will suffice to illustrate. He points to the fact that a letter has been written from the Corinthians to Paul. That, he maintains, would have been a far-fetched contrivance in a forgery, first to have feigned the receipt of a letter from the Church at Corinth and then to have drawn up a fictitious answer to it, relative to a great number of doubts and inquiries. Secondly, Paley also takes note of the fact that from all appearances the Corinthians in their letter to Paul exhibited only the fair side of their behavior. That, in Paley's estimation, was wholly natural, but at the same time also a distinction which would hardly have occurred to the author of a forgery.⁹

Now the question of sources is also raised. Paul is made a borrower and a plagiarist. Where did he get this and where did he get that? The critics carefully search through various apocalyptic literature and come up after long and painful efforts

9. Paley, op. cit., p. 60ff.

with the answer to the question of sources. But Lenski answers the critics on this point. These are letters in the full sense of the word, "Not pieces of literature intended for publication, and not epistles, learned compositions set down in literary form by a literary man. . . . No man could write as this man wrote by means of his own natural powers. . . . The evidential reason for this fact is that no man has ever been able to write so. The one explanation for the ability of Paul is divine inspiration."¹⁰

There has been much discussion also in regard to the place and time of writing. There are as many different dates advanced as there are systems of Pauline chronology. Suffice it to say that the letter was written in the year 55. The subscription as found in the authorized Bible of 1611 denotes Philippi as the place from which the epistle was written, but this is obviously contradicted by I Corinthians 16,8. Evidently Paul was still in Ephesus as he wrote. The mistake as it appears in this subscription probably arose from a misunderstanding of διερχόμενος in I Corinthians 16,5 to mean, "I am now passing through," instead of, "My route is through Macedonia."¹¹ With the exception of this subscription and a few suggestions from ultra-critical commentators, it is generally agreed that Ephesus is the place of writing. The evidence in favor of this is overwhelming.¹²

10. Lenski, op. cit., p. 10.

11. Horne, loc. cit.

12. Cp. I Corinthians 15,32; 16,19; 16,8; also 16,9 with Acts 19,20 and 19,9.

Chapter IV

With whom was the epistle sent to Achaia? This question is likewise answered in various ways, depending largely on the view that is taken in regard to the hypothesis of a "tear" letter and of a trip by Paul after the writing of I Corinthians. Because of the view taken in this paper on the question, we feel that it was Titus who was dispatched directly to Corinth with the letter. In all likelihood Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus went back to their home city along with Titus. In the discussion on the "tear" letter and the extra trip of which Paul seems to make mention it will be seen why this position is held.

The effects which this letter produced in Corinth also depend on these factors. The position will be taken that this was the letter written with many tears, and that the results which Titus later reported to Paul in Macedonia were the results which this letter produced. They were the results, the report of which caused Paul to pen those joyous and confident chapters in II Corinthians, especially chapters 1 to 7.

Let us proceed to a discussion of the various hypotheses which have been advanced from the liberal school of critical thought.

As far as to say the whole with hypotheses concerning changes in Pauline theology. "Paul is said to advance from his supposed Jewish theologian to Hellenistic philosophisms." The claim is that he turned from the Pharisee to a Hellenistic

A. L. S. p. 212. p. 213.

Chapter IV

Hypotheses

It is at this point that the critics have outdone themselves in their so-called "historical" criticism. The hypothesis of a letter written in many tears, a journey made to the king, and the unity of II Corinthians are so closely linked that we cannot avoid some overlapping of topics. It all began with Semler, who in 1776 proposed the idea that II Corinthians 10 to 14 was not an original part of the letter, but in itself made up still another letter which Paul had written to the Corinthians. At that time the opinion was passed over with not much concern, but in more recent times, Semler's original proposition has taken on the form of various and contradictory hypotheses arising from the imaginations of as many critics. The entire unity of II Corinthians is attacked, not so much on the basis of textual criticism, but largely on the basis of historical hypotheses regarding the interval of time between the writing of the two canonical epistles to the Corinthians. The entire conjecture would not be of much import were it not for the result to which it usually leads or has a tendency to lead. After having upset the logical and textual chronology, some go so far as to cap the whole with hypotheses concerning changes in Pauline theology. "Paul is made to advance from his supposed Jewish theologoumena to Hellenistic philosophoumena."¹ The claim is that "He turned from the Pharasaic to a Hellenistic

1. Lenski, op. cit., p. 815.

eschatology; did this on the strength of his Christ-mysticism and his Pneuma-doctrine, and in consequence of the mortal danger through which he had recently passed."² Indeed, Lenski goes on to state, "These beavers have worked with tireless industry to build their dam across the channel down which II Corinthians flows."³

The romance of the critics makes interesting fiction. Timothy, so the hypothetical theory runs, had been sent to Corinth via the land route across Macedonia. After Timothy had left, I Corinthians was written in which Paul announced the coming of Timothy (I Corinthians 16,10). Shortly before the riot of the silversmiths in Ephesus, Timothy returned to Paul with disheartening news - news which prompted Paul to make a hurried conciliating journey to Corinth. This is that journey which Paul is said to have made ἐν δυνάμει, the basis for which is found in the word ἰσχυρῶς of II Corinthians 2,1. On that journey Paul was deeply hurt and insulted. His efforts were a failure, and the opponents in Corinth loomed victorious. Paul was sick and grouchy and easily disturbed. His manner and method were harsh and unfortunate. Seeing that his mission was a failure, he returned to Ephesus and wrote a harsh letter, penned with deep emotions - with many tears and out of much anguish of heart. The letter was so painful and distressing that it was bound to hurt their feelings. In fact, after it was sent, Paul regretted having sent it. "It was evidently

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

one of those letters which most of us have sometime to write - so frank, personal, and severe that we know they will either mend or make matters irreparable."⁴ The letter was dispatched with Titus, after which Paul moved on to Macedonia where he would await Titus' return and the news of how the letter had been received.

The story has its variations, but the above is essentially the idea. Neander and De Wette have doubted whether Timothy ever reached Corinth at all, for his mission, if successful, would not have been left unnoticed in II Corinthians 12,17.18.⁵ But Timothy's visit is accepted as a fact that naturally made him an appropriate associate in the writing of II Corinthians (II Corinthians 1,1). There are others who maintain that Timothy was a failure in Corinth, and that when he returned to Ephesus, he presented the horrifying picture that prompted Paul's anguish. At the same time, so the claim is made, Titus was sent to Corinth with the "tear" letter in the hope that he would do a better job, for Titus had worked with some success there before.⁶ Away with these guesses! Timothy had been sent to Corinth by way of Macedonia because he was the best fitted for that mission. He was to carry instructions for the people of Macedonia, and since he was circumcized, since he had been with Paul when the Macedonian congregations were founded, he was the man. Titus was sent to Corinth later on not because he was the better man, but because Paul was moving on to Macedonia

4. Goodspeed, An Introduction to the New Testament, p. 115.

5. M'Clintock and Strong, op. cit., p. 513.

6. Walther Eickmann, Pilgrim Paul, p. 304.

himself and wanted Timothy there with him in the congregations which they had founded.

So then the hypothesis for a letter written in many tears is made to rest on the hypothesis of a journey made ἐν λύπῃ. Let us examine the evidence for the supposed journey to see whether or not it may be classed as evidence at all.

The evidence that is advanced as the basis for the visit between the writing of the two canonical epistles to the Corinthians is found in II Corinthians 2,1 where Paul states, ἐπιπλεονεξῶ ἑαυτοῦ ἵνα μὴ ἴδωμαι ἐν λύπῃ πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐπιθεῖν. The hypothetical solution of the critics rests on the word ἴδωμαι which seems to refer most naturally to ἐν λύπῃ. In other words Paul did not want to come again in grief, implying thereby that he had come to them in grief at a previous time. The meaning of the word ἴδωμαι is "again," or "back again." It is commonly used with words expressing going or coming, and in this case it is used with the aorist of ἐπιπλεονεξῶ. It is an adverb which for rhetorical emphasis may be placed forward in the sentence. To press the hypothesis of an unrecorded visit at this time on the basis of ἴδωμαι is not the historical criticism that the critics claim for themselves. The plain and simple meaning of the passage is that Paul did not want to come back to Corinth for his third visit in grief. That Paul did not make any third journey at all is not maintained by the present writer,⁷ but a third visit must be placed prior to the writing

7. See II Corinthians 12,14; 13,1.

of I Corinthians. To insert the visit after I Corinthians is to tear down the connection between the two letters. "We are forbidden to get light from I Corinthians; for light the critics refer us solely to their hypotheses."⁸ In order to come up with such hypothetical fillers the critics are forced to lengthen the period of time between the two letters from six months to eighteen months. But the fact of the matter is that Timothy had returned to Paul before they departed for Troas, and that Titus had been dispatched to Corinth with instructions to rejoin Paul in Macedonia. That leaves no time for any visit or intervening letter which is supposed. "This expedient of interpolating an event in a continuous history is always a doubtful one, and in this case seems excluded by the positive terms in which Paul's labors are confined, during the whole time in question, to Ephesus. Cp. Acts 19,10.22 and Acts 20,31."⁹

Alford has approached the problem in an interesting manner.¹⁰ Any intervening visit must be placed between Acts 18,18 and the writing of II Corinthians. Acts 18,18 to 19,9 is a continuous narrative, and surely no visit took place between I and II Corinthians, as is proved by II Corinthians 1,15-23. Hence, the terminus a quo is the settling at Ephesus of Acts 19,10, and the terminus a quem is the spring preceding the departure. Then on the basis of Τῶν ἐναυκῶν in II Corinthians 11,25 Alford is prompted to analyze the recorded journeys of Paul by sea and

8. Lenski, op. cit., p. 391.

9. M'Clintock and Strong, op. cit., p. 512.

10. Alford, op. cit., p. 52.

the possibility of a shipwreck on these journeys. His conclusion is that there must have been more sea journeys in order to account for the three shipwrecks, one of which may have occurred between Ephesus and Corinth.

Thus Alford holds that II Corinthians 1,15-23 excludes the possibility of an intermediate "grief" visit. The critics do not accept his claim. The view is that an unrecorded letter announced a change in Paul's plans, and that the unrecorded visit preceded that letter. The conservative opinion is, however, that the change in plans was already announced in I Corinthians 16,6 and that the unrecorded visit preceded that letter. To reject the contention that I Corinthians 16,5.6 already announced the change in plans the critics lean once again on πάρελ ἐξ αὐτοῦ of II Corinthians 2,1 which has been answered above.¹¹ We can get along very nicely without this critical fiction which is but a figment of the imagination. The plans of Paul to journey through Corinth to Macedonia and then to return to Corinth again were announced in a "previous" letter which we discussed in our first chapter. The news which prompted I Corinthians also moved him to change his plans, and of this he speaks in I Corinthians 16.

There are some few scholars who avoid the necessity of an unrecorded visit entirely.¹² This is done by interpreting the language of II Corinthians 12,14 and 13,1 to mean not an actual visit, but only intention. It is claimed that the words of

11. Cp. Moffat, op. cit., p. 118.

12. Thus Beza, Grotius, Paley. Cp. Alford, op. cit., p. 715.

12,14 do not actually state two prior visits, but only that he had had intentions of coming to them three times before. However, 13,1 does not seem to permit that sort of interpretation. And it is not likely that intentions would have meant much in the face of a people who were suspecting him of inconsistency with regard to the change in plans that he had made.

Thus, all that we know about the unrecorded visit is that it took place. The exact time cannot be ascertained, but it occurred before I Corinthians was written, perhaps as much as a year or two previous to that letter. But another hypothesis, closely allied with this, is that when Paul returned from his intermediate visit, he penned another letter, a "tear" letter, which has been lost. The basis for this rests in II Corinthians 2,1-11 and 7,8. The theory holds that Paul returned to Ephesus sorrowful over the fact that his mission had been a failure. Instead of visiting them again, which would have only led to pain, he wrote out of much distress and misery of heart with many tears. "This distress and passion made Paul's letter so militant and severe that the recollection of the language he had used afterwards caused him some qualms of conscience, although its threats and appeals were intended to lance a tumor."¹³

As stated, the hypothesis develops solely out of the hypothesis for an intermediate visit. Unless the critics lengthen the time between I and II Corinthians from six to eighteen months, there is hardly room for an intermediate visit,

13. Moffat, op. cit., p. 119.

and unless there is an intermediate visit, there can be no letter of tears. With the hypothesis of a "tear" letter thus conjured up, the critics seek painfully for further evidence till at length they hit upon the passage of II Corinthians already mentioned. Let's throw aside these guesses. To what does Paul refer in II Corinthians 2,1-11 and 7,8. Is it to I Corinthians, a letter which has enough severity to merit its being called the letter written in many tears? I Corinthians 4,8.14ff vibrate with irony and passion. Chapters 5 and 6 contain outbursts of emotion. The answer of the critics is an arbitrary negative one, holding that these passages are inadequate to account for Paul's references to his feelings. "In a cold-blooded way they catalogue where Paul may have, and where he could not have, shed tears when dictating I Corinthians, forgetting that they are about the last ones who are competent to gauge a writer's emotions. The notion that the whole letter must be dripping with tears, that all of the emotion of the writer must lie revealed on the surface . . . deserves only scorn from us."¹⁴

The historical method has its place in the field of interpretation. But the method is no longer historical when facts are replaced by imaginations, when gaps are filled with guesses, and when factual data are twisted to conform to whims. Lenski waxes bold in his condemnation of the critics:

"It is the very opposite of scientific scholarship to prostitute learning to a delight in inventing such hypotheses, and the greater the learning, the

14. Lenski, op. cit., p. 899.

greater the prostitution.

"Pardon the excursus; consider the provocation. Something to that effect, if said oftener, would check the rank jungle growths of Biblical criticism, and would plant more orchards with noble trees and real fruit."¹⁵

And now the fun begins. The critics have lost two letters, and the search is on. One of these lost letters may be regarded as a fact, while the other is a product of critics' hypothetical tendencies. II Corinthians is made the field for their search.

 15. Ibid., p. 817.

That's the story as Scripture teaches it. But before it is possible to discuss II Corinthians as a letter, it is first of all necessary to establish the fact that we actually have a letter to discuss. Here the critics have exercised their

Chapter V

II Corinthians

It was probably in the year 55 that Paul departed from Ephesus and crossed over to visit once again the congregations of Macedonia. Luke is brief in his account of Paul's stay there, telling only that he gave exhortation to those congregations and then moved on toward Greece (Acts 20,2). But from Paul's epistles it is apparent that there was drama during his brief sojourn among the Macedonians - drama at least within his own emotional life. Titus had been sent to Corinth from Ephesus with instructions to return and meet Paul somewhere in Macedonia, or at least some place between Macedonia and Ephesus, bringing news of the effect of I Corinthians. Paul hoped to meet Titus in Troas, but his younger co-worker was delayed, and though a great door was open to Paul and the Gospel in Troas, he completed his work there as quickly as expediency permitted and hurried along his way to meet Titus. At Philippi they met, and Paul's heart was overjoyed because of the good news which Titus had to report, although conditions were still not ideal and there were many things still to be reported for correction. II Corinthians was penned, and Titus was sent back to Corinth with the letter in order to direct affairs and to prepare for the collection.

That's the story as Scripture teaches it. But before it is possible to discuss II Corinthians as a letter, it is first of all necessary to establish the fact that we actually have a letter to discuss. Here the critics have exercised their

imagination to the utmost in attempting to find the lost letter of which we have spoken. Instead of leaving II Corinthians as a unit, they have mercilessly sliced into it and have found in an arbitrary manner the letters which are supports for their historical hypotheses.

It is not to be denied that II Corinthians is a letter of varying moods. There is diversity of tone in the three parts into which the letter naturally divides itself, and it is this apparent diversity which has been the starting point for the critics. Briefly their theory is that II Corinthians 6,14 to 7,1 is the "previous" letter or at least a fragment of it, and that II Corinthians 10 to 13 is the rebuking letter. Some have gone so far as to separate II Corinthians 8 and 9 into one or two more letters written after II Corinthians, urging the necessity of a good collection.¹

And where is the evidence? It has been stated before that the critics refuse to accept I Corinthians as the letter to which Paul refers as having been written in many tears. Their claim is that another one must have been written, and having made room for another letter, they proceed to find it in II Corinthians 10-13. These chapters, they feel, are written in the genuine tension which one would feel who has not as yet become absolutely sure of success in dealing with a difficult people. Here, then, are chapters which ring with anger. A group of intruders in Corinth had had some success in calling

1. Benjamin Willard Robinson, The Life of Paul, p. 174.

Paul's apostolic authority into question, and perhaps they had even humiliated him in some way. Paul was fighting mad. Chapters 10-13 were the result. This was the severe letter. According to the critics, it may not be the entire letter, for the abruptness with which 10,1 begins does seem to indicate that something had gone before, and here we may point them to II Corinthians 1-9 as having gone before. But there is an excuse for rejecting that view also. 10-13 cannot be a sequel to 1-9, is their claim. How can a section filled with so much joy and confidence be followed by one of such anger and rebuke? And surely chapters 10-13 were written before 1-9, for the latter section often echoes the former. 13,2 is echoed in 1,23; 13,10 in 2,3; 10,6 in 2,9; and 11,5.18.23 in 3,1-5,12. Then the critics proceed also to account for the reverse in chronological order which came about in the editing of the New Testament. But all they can say is that the earlier of the two was stripped of its beginning and added to the later and longer one so that a letter similar in length to I Corinthians would be the result. The argument is rather weak, but the critics reinforce their point by showing that similar things had been done with the writings of Cicero. And in this case the copyist was misled by the promise of a journey in chapter 9 which he thought was referred to in chapter 10.² That solution is at least more probable than the one which says that a copyist was gathering all of Paul's writings, placing them on two papyrus rolls in

 2. Moffat, op. cit., p. 120.

any order. When one roll was completed, he labeled it I Corinthians, and when the second was finished, he labeled that II Corinthians.³

We could proceed to pick flaws in the hypotheses even as the hypotheses have been based on supposed flaws in the New Testament Canon. But Moffat seems to have taken care of that.⁴ If we would argue that there is lack of any reference to the local offender in 10-13 (see II Corinthians 2,5; 7,12) whose case was not yet settled, he would answer that the whole of the severe letter is not given and that it may have appeared in another part. If we argue that 10,10 does not refer to an intermediate letter, but that the letter of I Corinthians 5,9 or even I Corinthians are alluded to, the answer is nothing more than disagreement of opinion.

It is evident that all argument against the unity of II Corinthians is but conjecture. For all the arguments advanced we could advance opposite ones to uphold the unity of the letter which would be as logical as any. Some have held that since writing 1-9, Paul received further news from Corinth which roused his temper and prompted the anger of 10-13. Moffat labels this as guesswork - a surprise label from one who advocates so much guesswork in his own hypotheses. Still others hold that in 10-13 Paul is addressing a certain faction in the congregation. Another view maintains that in 1-9 Paul praises repentance and in 10-13 rebukes partnership with his opponents.

3. Robinson, op. cit., p. 173.

4. Moffat, op. cit., p. 122f.

Or it may be, as still others have pointed out, that II Corinthians is a letter of moods which was composed in several sittings under different environments and temperaments. These opinions, however, all leave room for a disorderly letter. The most logical and sane view is that there is no disorder in the letter at all, but that Paul's thought has expressed itself in coherent and logical order. Thus the failure would not rest with Paul or with the New Testament Canon, but solely with the critics who have failed to follow Paul's thought.

But this is only a part of the story. The unity of II Corinthians is attacked also on 6,14-7,1. Here the critics have found a fragment of the previous letter, maintaining that the section in question is out of order here and that the connection of 6,13 and 7,2 is destroyed by its insertion. This contention, together with that regarding 10-13, are the basic contentions of those who wish to destroy the unity of the letter and make a composite of it. It will suffice our purposes to answer this negative opinion in a general manner, for in so doing each of the individual objections which modern criticism raises are also answered. We do not deny that there are two sides to the argument. It is not likely that the critic will convince the conservative nor that the conservative will convince the critic. Each is entitled to his own opinion unless the opinion prompts departure from the authority of Holy Writ. But which shall we accept?

"Conservative critics tend to uphold the unity of the books as they stand. If several

letters could have been jumbled into one letter, we cannot have a very high regard for the accuracy of what we have; our view of inspiration would have to be lowered a bit. If anyone can prove that some of our books are not units, we must be willing to accept the proof and make whatever adjustments are necessary. But we insist on strong proof."⁵

There is but one trouble with the critics. They have failed to follow Paul's thought in its connection. The entire interpretation of II Corinthians is unique and yet harmonious if the real thought of Paul is followed throughout. We cannot enter into the intricacies of Paul's thought and of the situation as he saw it; for such a sane and natural interpretation the reader is referred to the commentary of R.C.H. Lenski. After he has concluded a section discussing just such a controverted passage, that writer states, "If ever a doubt arises, doubt yourself first, not Paul and the text. Exegesis is full of mistakes which the exegetes have made, not the holy writers."⁶

This method of Biblical criticism is followed in all of the New Testament writings by the higher critics. It is nothing else than an underhanded attempt to break down the authority of Scripture and lead onward on the broad path toward rationalistic exegesis. Needless to say, such criticism often leads to the absurd and ludicrous. "The critics propose to tell us what Paul could and what he could not write in his letter. In their minds all of this settled by such canons as they are pleased to set up. . . So much the worse for us if we -----

5. Samuel Cartledge, A Conservative Introduction to the New Testament, p. 122. This is not a contradiction of what we have said previously concerning inspiration. Dealing with a lost letter and dealing with the unity of a letter are different things.

6. Lenski, op. cit., p. 1127.

do not agree and applaud."⁷

Enough of higher criticism! We prefer facts. The same attestation that is given I Corinthians is also given to this letter. The genuineness has never been doubted, and Paley in Horae Paulinae proves the authenticity of the letter, proceeding also here as he did with I Corinthians.

The first Epistle to the Corinthians had produced very different effects. There were many who repented, amended, and evinced respect for their leader by excommunicating the incestuous person. There were those who longed for his return (II Corinthians 7,7). But on the other hand there were those who adhered to false teaching and denied the apostolic authority. He was charged with levity and tyrannical severity. He was accused of arrogance and vain glory and considered by some as personally contemptible. This was the news that Titus brought from Corinth, the news which prompted the writing of II Corinthians.

A number of purposes entered Paul's mind as he undertook the writing of this letter which was to precede his own visit by about three months. In the first place, he desired to account for his not having come to them as soon as he had promised. Secondly, he wished to show that his sentence against the incestuous person was not tyrannical. Thirdly, he wished to show that he was successful in preaching the Gospel, not for his own sake or glory, but for the glory of the Gospel

7. Ibid., p. 822.

and Christ's Kingdom. And finally, he wanted to stir up the Corinthians to a holy life, excite them to the collection, and defend himself against the charges of his enemies. The letter was sent away with Titus and Luke.

Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthians is one in which he bares his heart as he does in no other. It is the love of his heart that speaks throughout, even in the stern concluding chapters. Two character sides are exposed. On the one hand there is exposed his deep love for those that are in Christ, and on the other his uncompromising attitude toward the opponents. There are more details of his own spiritual experiences in this letter than in any other, and among the interesting personal details are those that pertain to his mysterious elevation to paradise and the equally mysterious thorn in the flesh.

"It is like a mountain which on the one side slopes down into a lovely valley, furnishing pleasant pastures to the nibbling flock, and on the other side a sheer basaltic precipice rising in jugged abruptness from the deep defile and frowning like a fortress on every beholder."⁸

Three months later Paul himself came to Corinth and spent the winter months quietly with his flock. During those months he dictated his letter to the Romans to Tertius, thus concluding his third great missionary journey.

8. Taylor, op. cit., p. 341.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

It remains but to summarize the general hypotheses as we have viewed them. The most general of the critical hypotheses would arrange the correspondence between Paul and the Church at Corinth as follows:

- I. A letter written from Ephesus, referred to in I Corinthians 5,9, and probably preserved in part in II Corinthians 6,17 to 7,1.
- II. I Corinthians written from Ephesus in answer to the letter from Corinth.
- III. The painful letter written from Ephesus and preserved in part in II Corinthians 10-13.
- IV. The letter of reconciliation written from Macedonia and preserved in II Corinthians 1-9.

A slightly different view taken of the correspondence between Paul and the Corinthians is set forth by Benjamin Robinson:¹

- I. Paul's separatist letter of II Corinthians 6,14-7,1.
- II. The letter of Corinth to Paul, referred to in I Corinthians 7,1.
- III. Paul's reply which is our I Corinthians.
- IV. The letter of stern reproof.
- V. The letter of reconciliation.
- VI. A letter regarding the collection.
- VII. Still another letter on the collection.

On the conservative side there are some who have accepted

1. Robinson, op. cit., p. 174.

only the two canonical letters as we know them today, but the more commonly accepted view and the one accepted in this paper reads as follows:

- I. Paul's previous letter, I Corinthians 5,9.
- II. The Corinthian letter to Paul.
- III. I Corinthians.
- IV. II Corinthians.

These are the theories. Mention might also be made here of the apocryphal correspondence. The Syrian, Armenian, and some of the Latin Churches for some time admitted an apocryphal letter of Paul to the Corinthians which belonged to the Acta Pauli. This was translated into Latin during the third century. The letter centers about the advice which Paul gives to Stephanas on the question of the Gnostics, Simon and Cloebius. This correspondence, though once accepted as authentic, is today rejected. Another letter exists also among the apocrypha, a letter from the Corinthians to Paul. Both of these, however, have been proven spurious by Carpzov and Ullman.²

As we have tried to project ourselves back into the situation as it existed in Corinth we have met with countless difficulties. But this task of attempting to reconstruct that situation in order to establish with some degree of accuracy the correspondence which passed between Paul and the Corinthian congregation has been an interesting and highly profitable one. To do so, it became necessary to broaden

2. Moffat, op. cit., p. 129.

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our understanding of the throbbing life in one of the most important of the apostolic congregations, and it has compelled us to draw closer to the heart of Christ's greatest missionary who directed the affairs of that congregation on the basis of the pure teaching of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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