

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

SECOND EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS.

(Continued from p. 380.)

HAVING once entered on the description of the apostolic ministry, Paul pours forth his thoughts and feelings in one broad rapid stream. While by the power of life and death attached to that ministry, the servant of Christ is raised above the ignoble artifices of the teachers of legalism, the *glorious hopes* which it inspires sustain the Apostle himself in the midst of all his spiritual toil and travail, and make him triumph over all the discouragements which otherwise might overwhelm him. Everywhere he bears about with him the crucifixion of Christ, but everywhere also he has part in His resurrection; and if, in the end, the body is worn out in the strife and strain, he knows that God has prepared for him another habitation eternal in the heavens, in which he will soon enjoy perfect fellowship with Him (chap. iv. 7-v. 10).

With a heart thus raised above all low and petty motives, the Apostle sets himself to the task assigned to him. The baneful spirit of self-seeking has been cast out of him as out of all those who truly experience the redemption wrought out for them by Christ. Christ died for all; in Him then every believer is dead, as a natural man. There is in Christ only a company of risen men with whom the old earthly relations have passed away and all is become new. Even Christ Himself exists for them no more as an earthly, national, Jewish Christ, but only as the spiritual, heavenly Christ, in whom all old distinctions are done away, and He alone remains as the centre of a new creation. Marvellous indeed is the work wrought out by Him. God was in Christ first reconciling the world unto Himself and then by His ambassadors, the apostles, inviting every man to come to Him who had borne the sins of all, that they might be

made the righteousness of God in Him. So sublime a task absorbs the whole soul of him to whom it is entrusted and leaves no place for the satisfaction or glorification of self (chap. v. 10-21).

What remains therefore for the Apostle is to raise his conduct to the level of so high a calling. And this is what he has striven to do, as he shows in chapter vi., where he reminds the Church of what he has done for it since its foundation; what sufferings he has borne for its sake, and what Divine strength has upborne him through such a diversity of trial. Unhappily, he does not always find in the Church, especially at Corinth, such faithful affection as he had deserved from them. The more his heart is enlarged, the more theirs seems straitened towards him. Why is this? Because he is obliged to ask of them the sacrifices which fidelity to their Christian profession demands? St. Paul is probably thinking here of what he had said to them before (1 Cor. viii.-x.), as to the necessity of entirely giving up the feasts offered to idols in the heathen temples. This injunction seems to have most irritated the Corinthians who thought themselves strong, and who were wont to say, "All things are lawful for me." The various interpreters who have thought that the passage from chapter vi. 2-vii. 1, of this Epistle ought to be omitted, have so judged because they have failed to perceive this reference.

After affirming in the opening of chapter vii. that he has done nothing which should relax the bond of affection between them and him, Paul turns in ver. 4 to the joy that filled his heart on the recent arrival of Titus, whom he had met in Macedonia (4, 5). This forms a new starting point. So far he has been tracing things in order. This coming of Titus forms the goal. Paul had explained his return to Ephesus without staying at Corinth, then he had described his departure for Macedonia and waiting at Troas, then his meeting with Titus. The Apostle describes with

effusion the joy with which his heart is now filled at hearing the good news brought by Titus. In order to give the Corinthians some idea of its intensity, he dwells on the sorrow that he had felt after sending off his former stern letter of rebuke. But now how keen is his thankfulness, as he hears how they have avenged his wounded honour. Henceforth he knows that he may fully rely upon them.

This forms the transition to the second part of the Epistle, in which he urges them to press on with the important work of the collection.

Macedonia has already done its share, while so far it appears the Corinthians had done nothing. He has therefore decided to send Titus to them with two deputies from the Churches of Macedonia, and he is the bearer of this letter. Paul did not wish to make this collection burdensome to them, but on the other hand he was sure that a rich blessing would come from it to themselves and the whole Church (chap. viii., ix.). The Apostle speaks of one of the two deputies who accompanied Titus as a man whose gifts as an evangelist had made him famous through all the Churches of Macedonia. It seems probable, as several of the Fathers thought, that this messenger may have been St. Luke, who had remained with the Church at Philippi after the departure of Paul, Silas and Timotheus. It is possible that the other may have been Aristarchus, the Macedonian, who afterwards with Luke travelled with St. Paul to Rome.

Having thus reached the time present in this second part of his letter, Paul now turns his eyes to the *future*. The immediate future is his proposed visit to Corinth. It is natural that all his thoughts should be fixed on this goal of his desires, and he frankly sets forth his feelings in the third part of the Epistle (chap. x.-xiii.).

This clearly begins a fresh division, and Paul introduces it with the unusual formula: "*Now I Paul myself.*"

There is also a marked change of tone in the verses which follow. From affectionate tenderness he passes to the severest irony. The abruptness of the change is surprising. How could Paul utter such cutting rebukes after just assuring the Church of the joyful satisfaction he felt in its conduct (chap. vii.)? Some have gone so far as to suppose that these last four chapters are the very severe letter¹ previously sent by Titus to which the Apostle had referred in chapter vii., and that it has thus come down to us tacked on to the end of the later letter. But it is impossible that this second Epistle should have abruptly terminated with chapter ix.; and we should be driven to suppose that some one had carefully expunged the end of the genuine letter to affix to it another letter of quite a different tone. There is no ground for such far-fetched hypotheses. We see at once from chapter x. 2, where Paul speaks of "some which count of us as if we walked according to the flesh," that though he seems to be addressing the whole Church, he is really speaking here only to the disaffected party, and to the Church in so far as it had allowed itself to be influenced by it. The majority of the Church has returned, no doubt, to a better mind; but there is still a rebellious minority, whose opposition must be broken down, either by means of this letter or by energetic action when Paul comes. "Being in readiness to avenge all disobedience," he says, "when your obedience shall be fulfilled." There are these two things to be done: to secure on the part of the faithful a still more complete submission, and on the part of the recalcitrant a full surrender. This is the drift of these four chapters, which thus connect themselves quite naturally with the foregoing.

The Apostle implores them not to force him to use, when he comes, the apostolic power which Christ has given him. Doubtless there are among them those who

¹ Hausrath, *Der Vier-Capitel Brief*.

do not believe that he has any such power, and who accuse him of being weighty and strong only while he is at a distance, but in presence weak and contemptible. He argues, however, that he has given in his ministry irrefutable proof of his spiritual power. Was he not the founder of this very Church of Corinth, into which these his adversaries have obtruded themselves, entering into other men's labours? "Not he that commendeth himself (by vaunting words) is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth," sealing his work by signs following.

Since his enemies disparage him, he is fain to defend himself, from very love to the Church, and in order to keep intact the spiritual bond by which he has bound them to Christ.

Does he not see them turning aside from the doctrine he taught them, and receiving with open arms any who come preaching another Jesus and a different Spirit? Yet, he asks, in what was he behind these new apostles for whom they set him aside? There is only one thing in which they outdo him; they take pay for their preaching, and get themselves maintained by the Church. In this respect alone will he own his inferiority to these false apostles, who, like Satan, can clothe themselves as angels of light. Well then, since they force him to it, and though it would be folly under any other circumstances, he will reveal to them the secrets of his soul's travail, and of his inmost life. And here the Apostle describes, with an incomparably graphic touch, all the privations which he has endured for Christ. He could, indeed, go on to tell them of more glorious things. The great city of Damascus was one day stirred to a frenzy about him, and sought to kill him. Then he had visions and raptures of revelation, in which he was caught up to the very third heavens. But to speak of these things is folly. If he must speak, let it rather be of the infirmities which humble him, and are, therefore, his

safeguard. Such is that thorn in the flesh which he carries about with him, and about which the Lord said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee." If he must glory, let him glory in those things which keep him weak, for then is he strong (chap. xi. 1-xii. 11).

From this picture, which he has felt constrained to draw in self-defence, he turns again to his adversaries, and to those members of the Church who had let themselves be carried away by them.

As there is only one point on which he has not made good his apostleship among them, namely, by receiving nothing at their hands, he will adhere to the same course of conduct when he comes again. Some had dared to say that this was only a pretence, and that he knew well enough how to get money for himself through his agents. Let them prove, then, that one of those whom he had sent had acted in this respect differently from himself. Those who bring this charge against him will do well to take heed and examine themselves, lest, after having been warned, the Apostle finds them when he comes, just as before, and is obliged to deal sharply with them, according to the authority the Lord has given him. He would rather show himself gentle and weak among them. Let them not force him to come with a rod; for if he can do nothing *against* the truth, he can do something *for* it. But his desire is, that in this coming visit all the weakness should be on his part, and all the strength on theirs (chap. xii. 11-xiii. 10).

The Apostle concludes with a short exhortation to joy, unity, peace; and with a blessing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, which, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, he substitutes for the old priestly benedictions. It was not then without reason that Paul commenced this section with the words, "I Paul myself." This part of the letter has been taken up with purely per-

sonal matters, but not by his own choice; the necessity was laid upon him.

It is natural to ask, Who were then these bitter enemies of Paul, who came to exert such an important and disastrous influence upon the Church of Corinth? They were evidently emissaries from without, for they had brought with them letters of commendation (chap. iii. 1). On their arrival they had taken advantage of the disunion which had already crept into the Church. Seeing that the more faithful disciples of Paul were treated with scant respect by those who were taken up with Apollos, and that these again were slighted by those who boasted of belonging to Peter's party, they took occasion to commend themselves as the only ones who really came in the name of Christ. What ground could they have for arrogating to themselves such a distinction? Baur and his school suppose that they took this title because they were sent by the apostles of Christ, and especially by James, the Lord's brother. Those whom Paul calls in this letter "*the very chiefest apostles,*" must, then, be the Twelve, and it is from them that these Jewish emissaries must have received the "letters of commendation" mentioned in this Epistle. Pursuing this track, the famous leader of the Tübingen school has come to the conclusion, that in the early Church, Paul and the Twelve lived and worked in a spirit of mutual antagonism.

But it is easy to see the falsity of this idea. The Twelve after having given the hand of fellowship to St. Paul, as he himself tells us (Gal. ii.), could not send out messengers from the Churches of Palestine, fortified with letters of commendation from them, to hinder Paul's work among the Gentiles.

Moreover, these men who claimed to be specially "of Christ," did not set themselves to oppose the followers of Paul and of Apollos alone, but of Peter also (1 Cor. i. 12).

Lastly, it is quite evident from 2 Cor. xi. 5, 6, that those whom the Church of Corinth seriously, and Paul ironically, called "the very chiefest apostles," were personages distinguished in some degree by their culture and eloquence; for Paul says: "I reckon that I am not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles; since though I am rude (*ιδιώτης*) in speech, I am not in knowledge." These men were then exalted above Paul for their gifts of speech, just as Apollos had already been preferred to him on the same ground. How could this apply to the Twelve, who are themselves characterised as "unlearned and ignorant men" (*ἀγραμματοὶ καὶ ἰδιῶτα*, Acts iv. 13), and who were certainly far inferior to Paul in eloquence? The Apostle gives us to understand also that he had come behind these men in this respect; that he had not (like them) made himself burdensome to the Church (xi. 7; xii. 2). Now there can be no doubt that he is speaking of the Church of Corinth (xi. 20) when he describes the ill-advised conduct of these intruders in her midst. But the Twelve had never been at Corinth. It is not then the apostles at Jerusalem, but these new comers themselves whom Paul thus ironically describes, in language borrowed from their ardent partisans. In thus describing them, he stigmatises them as placing themselves not only above him, Paul, but also above those who in the ordinary language of the Church were called apostles, and especially above Peter. Some critics even of the Tübingen school have clearly seen that it was impossible to regard these adversaries of Paul as directly sent by the Twelve; and they have ventured on the conjecture that they were rather men who had personally known Christ at Jerusalem, perhaps some of His kindred or acquaintance, who, going about to preach Him in the synagogues, had come as far as Corinth. We know, indeed, from 1 Cor. ix. 5, that the brethren of the Lord did go about as missionary evangelists. But we have no authority

for attributing to them feelings of hostility to Paul, nor views differing from those of the Twelve.

The account which Paul gives of the Conference at Jerusalem (Gal. ii.) excludes, as is now fully recognised, any idea of hostility to the work of Paul among the Gentiles, on the part of James the Lord's brother. He, too, had at that Conference recognised Paul as a divinely called apostle, no less than Peter, and had given him the right hand of fellowship. Hence we conclude that these strange missionaries, who had formed a hostile party to Paul at Corinth, designating itself as "of Christ," came no doubt from Palestine, and probably from Jerusalem, but that like "the false brethren privily brought in," of whom Paul speaks (Gal. ii. 4), they did not belong to the Twelve, but acted independently of them, and even presumed to set themselves above them. They were probably of the number of those "priests" and "Pharisees" whom Luke mentions (Acts vi. 7; xv. 5) as having acknowledged Jesus as their Messiah. Having once entered the Church, these members of the Jewish aristocracy had hoped to take the direction of affairs into their own hands. They despised the apostles, as unlearned and ignorant men, and thought that they should shape as they pleased the work of Christian missions, the importance of which they recognised as a feature of the Messianic kingdom. They hoped, as we have seen in studying the Epistle to the Galatians, to make use of the conquering power of the Gospel as a means of extending the kingdom of the law in the Gentile world. Animated with this spirit, more legal than Christian, they set aside the apostles, and endeavoured to divert to their own ends the labours of Paul.

This, if we mistake not, was the party whose emissaries came to Corinth, furnished with letters of commendation. Since the conflicts in Antioch and Galatia however, they had changed their tactics. They no longer spoke of cir-

cumcision, which would at once have repelled the Greeks, but they falsified even more thoroughly the spirit of the Gospel. Paul accuses them of preaching *another Jesus*, of introducing *another Spirit* and *another Gospel*. They are the tools of the serpent who beguiled Eve (chap. xi. 1-4). It is obviously at them that, in closing his first Epistle, Paul abruptly flings the challenge: "If any man love not the Lord, let him be anathema." This is all of which we can be sure. We do not know what was this new Jesus, this new Gospel, this new Spirit which they brought in. It would seem that it was something more than a doctrine in which legal elements were blended. The term, "*another Jesus*," suggests some new and dangerous theory of Christology, and I am disposed to think that it was at these neologists Paul aimed the vigorous arguments against human wisdom which we find in the first four chapters of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and which have often been erroneously thought to apply to Apollos. However this may be, the Judæo-Christian character of these people is put beyond question by the passage 2 Cor. xi. 22, 23. It would appear, moreover, that they had not scrupled to ally themselves at Corinth with men of licentious life (chap. xii. 20, 21). All means seemed to them legitimate that would help to overturn the work of Paul.

We see now how wisely Paul proceeds in dealing with this deadly error. He first tries to strengthen all the links which unite him to the better part of the Church. Then, when he feels that the majority has once more rallied firmly in defence of his person and his apostleship, he attacks with all the energy of which he is capable, the rebellious party with its strange leaders, and sets before them his ultimatum.

What did these men do whom Paul had so menaced and stigmatised? Did they await his arrival? Did they resolve to hold out against him? We doubt it. Either

they left the place of their own accord, in consequence of this letter, or the Church made them go. Touched with the tenderness of those words: "I determined this for myself, that I would not come again to you with sorrow; for if I make you sorry, who then is he who maketh me glad but he that is made sorry by me?" it hastened to banish all the obnoxious elements that might have called for the stern exercise of the apostolic authority. The three months which Paul spent at Corinth during the winter of the years 58-59, were months of peace. Of this we have the proof in our hands. The Epistle to the Romans was the fruit of this repose.

In this Second Epistle to the Corinthians we get the fullest insight into the heart of the Apostle, so full of tenderness, human and Divine. From it we learn what were his views of apostleship, and of the Christian ministry generally. Nothing finer has been written on this subject than the passages in which it is treated in this letter. And if in the Epistle to the Romans we find the fullest statement of the Gospel, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians the most complete chapter of Church discipline, we have in this Second Epistle to the Corinthians the very mind of God with regard to the institution of the Christian ministry.

F. GODET.

THE REVISED VERSION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

A CRITICAL ESTIMATE.

FIFTH PAPER.

WE hold that the Revisers were bound to make some sense of every passage in the books before them. We do not intend this for satire. We admit that Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Psalms, and other O. T. Scriptures contain passages which