INTRODUCTION TO SECOND CORINTHIANS
By Burton Coffman

Reference is made to the introduction to 1 Corinthians, since all that is said there with reference to the authorship and authenticity of that epistle is also true of this.

Authorship: "That the Second Epistle is a genuine work of the apostle Paul has seldom been seriously disputed."<1> Furthermore, even in the instances in which radical scholars have questioned its authenticity, the result has been the discredit of themselves, rather than the erosion of the confidence with which the Christians of all ages have received both these epistles as absolutely canonical and authentic works of the blessed Paul. "That the apostle Paul was the author of what is now known as 2 Corinthians is not a matter of dispute in reputable scholarly circles."<2> Both external and internal evidence of its genuineness are overwhelmingly sufficient. "It would be difficult to find a composition more convincingly impressed with the personality of its author."<3>

Date: Hughes gave the date of 2 Corinthians as "the autumn of 57 A.D."<4> Macknight favored "the summer of 57 A.D."<5> Lipscomb set it in "the latter part of 57 A.D."<6> The discovery of the fragment of a limestone tablet at Delphi in 1905, fixing the date of Gallio's coming to Corinth as proconsul in the year 51 A.D.<7> has led to an adjustment of the usually accepted date for 2 Corinthians. As Tasker said, "The Second Epistle to the Corinthians was almost certainly written in the late autumn of A.D. 56."<8>

The Unity of 2 Corinthians: The irresponsible speculations and denials of radical scholars in the first half of this century are no longer of any significance. As Hughes pointed out, there was a time when to question the unity of 2 Corinthians "was to be very much in the fashion, but now a swing back to the traditional view of the letter's integrity is noticeable."<9> Hughes went on to name a number of the outstanding scholars of today who declared that "2 Corinthians is beyond doubt a unity."<10> There has never existed even the slightest evidence to the contrary. The epistle has come down through history as a unit; and the fulminations of critics who based their theory of a chopped-up letter containing fragments of other documents solely upon internal characteristics of the epistle have been repeatedly refuted and frustrated. Tasker summed it up by saying, "It is our duty to approach the Second Epistle to the Corinthians as a unity."<11>

How many letters? First Corinthians refers to a letter Paul had written, and which had been misunderstood (1 Cor. 5:9), a letter which was lost, no copy of it having survived. Beyond this, however, this student is not willing to go to the extent of postulating another lost letter, usually referred to by scholars as "the severe letter." The theory of such a letter is founded upon a misreading of 2 Cor. 2:5-9; and for a discussion of this see the notes under those verses. That 1 Corinthians
itself may be identified as the "severe letter" of 2 Cor. 2:5-9 and 2 Cor. 7:8 is
evident in the fact that many of the wisest scholars have been doing so for many
generations. Even some who have postulated the "severe letter" as being
another lost document have candidly admitted that such a postulation "is not
necessary."<12> Again, it should be reiterated that no evidence of any kind has
ever been discovered that lends the slightest credibility to the existence of a lost
"severe letter." The true instincts of faith in Christ lead automatically to the
rejection of the kind of wild guessing which marks the works of critical scholars
trying to support a hypothesis. Once the imagination of the lost severe letter is
accepted as a fact, then the explanations of what was in it surpass all the
boundaries of likelihood or reason. All of the dogmatic assertions of what was
"probably" in that lost letter may be set aside as having no value whatever. They
are not even good reading.

Occasion of writing: All that is certainly known of the occasion for the writing of
2 Corinthians is that it was written about a year after 1 Corinthians. After the riot
at Ephesus, Paul found it necessary to leave there for Macedonia; but, in spite of
the fact that wonderful opportunity opened to him at Troas, where he had
stopped en route, his anxieties regarding the situation in Corinth began to press
upon him very heavily. It may be assumed that he had received some news at
intervals after the 1 Corinthian letter had been delivered; but the question of
whether or not they would obey his commands still remained in Paul's mind. The
mention of the expected coming of Titus to Troas, where Paul had hoped to meet
him, indicates that Titus might have been working with the situation at Corinth for
some time; but, as preachers often do, Titus had neglected to write Paul any real
news of what had taken place. Paul, therefore, could not settle down for a
preaching tour in Troas; but, instead, he decided to strike out through Macedonia
in search of his brother Titus. He met him, supposedly at Philippi, learned the
glad news of the obedience of the Corinthians, and promptly wrote 2 Corinthians.
Paul's supposed reference to "the severe letter" in 2 Cor. 7:8 is quite applicable
to the severe admonitions and apostolic condemnations in the canonical first
letter; and it is a thousand times more reasonable to suppose that the matchless
words of that inspired epistle produced the change at Corinth than to attribute
their repentance to some speculative "bawling out" administered in a letter
supposedly lost.

Is the "severe" letter incorporated in this Second Epistle, beginning at 2 Cor.
10:17 Absolutely no! The very existence of any "severe" letter must be denied,
as Hughes so ably demonstrated; and the hypothesis that it did exist is worthless
as the basis for another hypothesis to the effect that a considerable fragment of it
became a part of 2 Corinthians. In this monstrous hypothesis built upon another
hypothesis, the radical critics have elaborated an absurdity. It would seem that
the fallacy of 2 Corinthians being a "scissors and paste" job, like those of modern
critics, was concocted out of utter ignorance or total disregard of the way in which
ancient manuscripts were produced. How foolish is the notion that "some leaves
of one letter got mixed up with another"; when, as a matter of fact, Paul's letters
were written on parchment in the form of a roll; and there were no "leaves"! As Munch said of the alleged interpolation beginning at 2 Cor. 10:1, "This assumption will not hold water."<13>

**Criticisms of Paul:** It is clear that 2 Corinthians was Paul's response to vicious and untruthful slanders alleged against him by false teachers and savage partisans at Corinth. These will be noted in the text of the commentary as the evidence of them occurs; but this summary of them should be kept in mind: (1) some questioned his credentials as a true apostle; (2) they alleged vacillation and cowardice on his part, due to his change of plans; (3) they hinted charges of irregularity in his handling the collection for the poor in Jerusalem; (4) they charged him with conscious inferiority, citing the fact that he did not preach for pay; (5) they demeaned his personal appearance and made fun of his sermons, etc., etc. It is not hard to see in such evil slurs the hand of the Jewish hierarchy in Jerusalem. They never missed any opportunity of pursuit and harassment of their former sheriff who became the most gifted of apostles.

**Nature of the epistle:** There is no doubt that this letter creates and sustains an emotional impact nowhere exceeded in the New Testament. It is a letter of "profound spiritual riches."<14> F. W. Farrar stated that:

As hope is the keynote of the Epistles to the Thessalonians, joy of that to the Philippians, faith of that to the Romans, heavenly things to that of the Ephesians, affliction is the predominant word and thought in the Second Epistle to Corinthians.<15>

Paul was a man of absolute integrity; and, as an apostle of Christ, one of the most gifted who ever lived. When such a man was subjected to the attack of vicious and unprincipled enemies, his very soul was outraged. The pouring out of his impassioned defense in this letter is as eloquent and moving a dissertation as was ever penned upon earth. Even beyond that, the fire of his inspiration illuminates every line of it.

**Outline:** The epistle falls naturally into three divisions: 2 Cor. 1--7 stress the joy and relaxation that Paul felt upon receiving the good news of the success of his corrective efforts in Corinth. 2 Cor. 8--9 are principally concerned with the promotion of the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. 2 Cor. 10--13 contain Paul's impassioned and vehement defense of his apostleship. The logical unity of these three sections will become starkly evident as they are studied.

Abbreviations: These are the same as those already listed in the introduction to 1 Corinthians.

**ENDNOTES:**


<3> Ibid.

<4> Ibid.


<9> Philip E. Hughes, op. cit., p. xxi.

<10> Ibid., p. xxii.

<11> R. V. G. Tasker, op. cit., p. 35.

<12> Ibid., p. 18.


<14> Philip E. Hughes, op. cit., p. xxxv.


[The Introductions to 1 & 2 Corinthians are taken from the electronic version of Coffman’s New Testament Commentaries published by Abilene Christian University Press.]
Introduction to 2 Corinthians. By James Rochford and Josh Peltier. Download an mp3 teaching series from James HERE! Download an mp3 teaching series from James HERE! 1. Introduction. 2. Choosing a translation for 2 Corinthians. Second, Paul emphasizes dependence on God, not self. This is a prevalent theme in the letter. It also goes along the same vein of Paul’s argument against the false apostles later on in the letter. This is the second NT epistle the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in the city of Corinth (see Introduction to 1 Corinthians). Author and Date. That the Apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians is uncontested; the lack of any motive for a forger to write this highly personal, biographical epistle has led even the most critical scholars to affirm Paul as its author. Several considerations establish a feasible date for the writing of this letter. After leaving Corinth, Paul heard of immorality in the Corinthian church and wrote a letter (since lost) to confront that sin, referred to in 1 Cor. 5:9. During his ministry in Ephesus, he received further reports of trouble in the Corinthian church in the form of divisions among them (1 Cor. 1:11). In addition, the Corinthians wrote Paul a letter (1 Cor.