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The Unity of Second Corinthians



While the authorship of **Second Corinthians** has not been questioned, its unity has been the subject of much debate. In particular some scholars, without any reason other than their bent to discredit the integrity of Scripture, and deny **the book's** unity. Noting the abrupt change in tone between **Chapters 1-9** and **10-13**, they argue that they were originally two separate letters that somehow became fused into one now known as **Second Corinthians**. At the outset it must be stated that such theories are entirely subjective, based on supposed internal evidence within the book itself. R. C. H. Lenski (1864-1936) wrote, "One fact in regard to **Second Corinthians** must be strongly emphasized at the very beginning that all, literally all textual evidence proves this letter is a unit. No abbreviated text has ever been discovered that might raise a question on this score, and no text that showed an omission or omissions has ever been found. This fact alone stands as a defense against the hypotheses that **Second Corinthians** was written by more than one author."

Further, there is no evidence from early translations of the Bible, or from the writings of the church fathers that **Second Corinthians** ever existed as two or more separate letters. There is also no evidence as to who compiled those hypothetical letters into **Second Corinthians**, when they did it, or why they did it – only the conjecture on the part of critics. What happened to the conclusion of the first letter and the introduction of the second to allow the two to be joined is also unknown. The critics also often fail to take into account the physical difficulty involved in editing the scrolls on which ancient letters were written.

Some propose that Chapters 10-13 are actually the severe letter mentioned in 2:4, and hence written before Chapters 1-9. This theory, however, faces major difficulties, in addition to the lack of textual evidence already noted above.

First, the absence of any reference to **the false apostles** in **Chapters 1-9** is puzzling if **the Corinthians** had already received **Chapters 10-13**. Even if they had rejected **the false apostles** before **Paul** wrote **Chapters 1-9**, **he** surely would have commended them for doing so. Yet, **Chapters 1-9** don't mention the conflict between **Paul** and **the false apostles**, only the single individual who defied **him (2:5-11** and **7:12)**.

Second, **Chapters 10-13** are silent regarding that individual. Yet, the severe letter was written to deal with **the Corinthians** refusal to discipline him **(2:4-9)**. If **Chapters 10-13** constitute the severe letter, how could they fail to refer to the offense that prompted its writing?

Third, **Paul** described the severe letter as one written **with a greatly distressed and anguished heart, and with many tears (2:4a).** That description does not seem to fit the contents of **Chapters 10-13**, with **Paul's** biting irony and stern rebukes of **the false apostles** and their followers. Why would **he regret (7:8)** having so forcefully defended **his** apostleship, or relating **his** human weakness that proved **God** empowered **his** ministry?

Fourth, in **12:18 Paul** spoke of **Titus'** trip to **Corinth** in connection with **the collection (8:6** and **16-24)** as having already taken place. Since, as noted above, **he** brought the severe letter to **Corinth** on that trip, **Chapters 10-13** obviously cannot be the severe letter. **Titus** could not have delivered a letter describing his bringing of that letter as having already happened.

Finally, **Paul** sent the severe letter to avoid visiting **Corinth (2:1-4)**, but **he** wrote **Chapters 10-13** to prepare for an upcoming visit **(12:14** and **13:1)**.

Others, acknowledging those difficulties, argue that Chapters 10-13 were a separate letter but one that was written after Chapters 1-9.

Once again, it must be noted that there is no evidence that **Chapters 10-13** ever circulated separately from **Chapters 1-9**. A variation of that view is that before **Paul** sent **Chapters 1-9**, he received word of further troubles in **Corinth**. **He** then

wrote **Chapters 10-13** and sent the entire letter. This faulty theory suggests that **Paul’**s busy life in ministry, traveling, and working to support **himself** may possibly have prevented **him** from writing **Second Corinthians** at one setting. But like I said, this is merely a theory. Nowhere in **Chapters 10-13** does **Paul** mention receiving new information from **Corinth**.

The difference in tone between the two sections of the letter must not be overstated. In **Chapters 1-9 Paul** defended **himself (1:17, 4:2, 5:12-13)**, and rebuked **the false apostles (2:17)**; while in **Chapters 10-13 he** expressed **his** love and concern for **the Corinthians (11:11, 12:14-15, 13:9)**. When the plan of the letter is taken into account the reason for **Paul’s** change in tone is perfectly understandable. **Chapters 1-9** are addressed to **the majority (2:6)**, who repented because of the severe letter, while **Chapters 10-13** were intended for the unrepentant minority, who still clung to **the false apostles**, **the same** in **10:2,** who still regarded **Paul** as if **he** was **living in a worldly way.**[7]