

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

*THE CRITICAL PROBLEMS OF THE EPISTLE TO
THE PHILIPPIANS.*

It is well known that the later Epistles of St. Paul have certain general differences from the earlier Epistles, and do not call into existence quite the same problems.

As a whole there is now not much serious discussion as to the authenticity of the earlier Epistles; but when we reach the later Epistles we begin to find that there is real reason for asking serious questions as to the authenticity of some, and as to the "integrity"—to use rather a bad word—of others.

It is desirable to consider the general nature of these questions of authenticity and integrity, because we are not here dealing with a problem which we can treat in quite the same manner as if it concerned the letters of a contemporary or of any one of whom we have considerable knowledge. What do we mean when we say we believe that the earlier Epistles of St. Paul are all genuine? We mean, of course, that St. Paul wrote them; but what do we mean by that?

Surely not quite the same sort of belief as we should imply if we said, "Here is a letter written by Napoleon." In the case of Napoleon we should mean that here is a document that is testified to by external evidence, and henceforward will take its place in our general complex of knowledge about Napoleon. We interpret it in the light of our knowledge of the man. But one cannot do that with St.

Paul's Epistles ; here we have rather to interpret the **man** by means of his writings, and these letters are the only writings that we have professing to be written by St. Paul. We can, of course, say " these are the sort of things which would have been written by some one who was a Christian who lived at that time ; but in point of fact our ideas of what a Christian would have written are largely based on the Epistles themselves. To follow the circle round with more or less lucidity, is all that we really do. We can in the end only say that these Epistles come to us with a tradition, which is unbroken as far as we can trace it, that they are written by St. Paul ; so that by St. Paul we mean primarily " the writer of the Epistles," with the further implication that the author was writing in his own name, and by the clear evidence of the character of the document—not adopting a pseudonym or inventing imaginary circumstances as an artificial background to the composition. The character of the letters shows that they are not pseudepigraphs, and in the end that is all that we mean when we say that the authenticity of the earlier Epistles is indubitable.

That applies with complete force to the main portion of the collection of the Epistles of St. Paul, but not to the whole of it, for the earlier Epistles are only part of the collection. When you take them as a standard and compare with them the other writings in the same collection, you have a different problem.

The question of authenticity is now really a question of comparison between the later and earlier Epistles. The difficulty which arises is clear. It is a difficulty which has nothing to do with criticism in the sense of the discovery of new facts, nor does the theory of " non-Pauline " origin necessarily imply pseudepigraphy. It need only imply that some redactor found material which he—erroneously—regarded as Pauline, and incorporated in the collection of

Pauline epistles, though of course certain theories as to Ephesians and to Pastoral Epistles go further than this. The real difficulty—and it will never disappear—is concerned with our general views on human nature.

You can settle the question of the authenticity of the later Epistles if you can give an answer to four questions:—

(a) What are the limits of change in a writer's style in writing letters? (b) How far is a man's style likely to change from one letter to another? (c) How far are a man's thoughts likely to change from year to year? (d) What are the limits of development in the human intellect?

The question of authenticity is quite simple to answer when you can answer those questions. But the fact is that no one can answer them, and I should say that till the end of time there will be room for a certain amount of doubt as to the authenticity of some of the later Epistles.

We now come to the question of integrity; the question, that is to say, whether it is not possible that in some of the Epistles we have got *not* documents written all at once by the same writer, but either a collection of fragments written by the same writer (that is to say by St. Paul) but not written at the same time, or else documents which are in the main written by St. Paul, which also contain paragraphs added by somebody else in order to twist the meaning round to suit his own purpose.

Neither of these possibilities can be excluded because we know that both of them can be paralleled in Christian literature.

Finally, there is one more question which is always important and has been more widely recognised than the other two. That is the question of the "date." I do not mean the actual year in which any given epistle was written, but the relative date.

These remarks are introductory to a discussion of the Epistle to the Philippians. You will find that in the Epistle to the Philippians you have to deal with the question of integrity and with the question of date; the question of authenticity does not come nearly so much into the foreground of the picture as it does in connexion with Colossians and Ephesians or with the Pastorals.

1. *The Question of Integrity.*

Ever since the modern study of the Epistle to Philippians began a difficulty has been found in chapter iii., and it is this which raises the question of integrity. The simplest way to show what the difficulty is, is to write out a piece of the Epistle at the doubtful point. St. Paul says that he is going to send back to the Philippians their friend Epaphroditus, but he says they will be sorry to hear he has been sick. "For indeed he was sick,—nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him, and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully that when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord, with all gladness; and hold such in reputation. Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life to supply your lack of service toward me.

"Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord, rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice. Let your moderation (τὸ ἐπιεικὲς) be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand; be anxious for nothing, etc."

Who would see anything wrong with that? No one; unless he knew the text by heart no one would realise that I have left out a chapter and a half.

Let me now copy it again, putting in the beginning of what I have left out.

“ I sent him therefore the more carefully that when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness ; and hold such in reputation. Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life to supply your lack of service toward me. Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, etc.”

Does that fit on ? Is it natural to say “ rejoice in the Lord always ” and then suddenly say “ Beware of dogs ” ? Those questions are the justification of the critics who say there is the possibility of interpolation in the Epistle, or that something of a literary nature has gone wrong. And we must remember that to recognise this is quite another thing to saying that any special theory is entirely satisfactory.

The theory that in some form is always present is that the section that begins “ Beware of dogs ” is a fragment of another Epistle written by St. Paul to the Philippians at another time. It is not suggested that this is an interpolation by some one else and not by St. Paul, but that it is a fragment of another Epistle written by St. Paul to the Philippians. It is in itself not an improbable theory, seeing that something of the kind almost certainly has happened to 2 Corinthians, but what is against it is that although there is a clear “ seam ” at the beginning, there is not one at the end. The point at which the beginning of the interpolation—“ Beware of dogs ”—is reached is clear, but it is not so easy to say where we ought to put the end of it. After the beginning the text seems to run smoothly until it merges in the end of the Epistle, and to refer to the same circumstances as those to which allusion was made at the beginning—the help that was being sent by the

Philippians. If we could draw a line sharply at the end as at the beginning, the theory of interpolation would be nearly certain. As it is, more complicated views have been suggested, and complication in such cases always means uncertainty.

The theory which best gets round the difficulty is that of Hausrath,¹ who suggests that what happened is this :— St. Paul was imprisoned. The Philippians sent help to him and he wrote a letter in which, besides thanking them, he also indulged in some strong remarks about a school of thought with which he did not agree ; warning them against listening to his opponents and referring to them as “ dogs ” ; part of this is preserved in Philippians iii. 1—end. Then later on he wrote another letter in which he refers once more to their kindness and explains that he was now sending back to them Epaphroditus. There is a short interval of time between the two. The first Epistle (which is the *second* part of our Epistle), was his letter of thanks and warning which was written under the influence of his first hearing of the school of thought which had become prevalent at Philippi. The second Epistle (which is the first part of our Epistle) was written later, when he found it necessary to send Epaphroditus back, also saying that he hopes to send Timothy before long to see how the Church is progressing.

That is a not impossible theory ; and after all we cannot reach more than possibilities when the evidence is insufficient to prove anything. It is, at all events, the best of the theories of its kind. But there is one especially weak point in it. According to this St. Paul does a strange thing—though it is not an impossible one. He has received an important present from the Philippians, and yet does not thank them until the end of his letter. He warns them about other people before thanking them, and this is not natural. Thus

¹ *Paulus*, pp. 486 ff., and *Neutest. Zeitgesch.*, III. p. 398 f.

the partition theory of Hausrath is not quite satisfactory, because it leaves a difficulty on our hands, and a theory is not satisfactory until it covers all the difficulties of the case.

For this reason I should personally incline to the view which is implied in the reconstruction written above. I think that there may be an interpolation beginning with iii. 1 (or iii. 2) and ending with iv. 3. The "seam" at the end is not so clear as at the beginning, but I think that it is not quite invisible. The interpolation I should regard as genuinely Pauline, and I should quote as a parallel 2 Corinthians vi. 14–vii. 1, which certainly seems not only probably to be an interpolation in 2 Corinthians, but possibly to be a fragment of the "Previous letter" of Paul to the Corinthians which preceded 1 Corinthians.

It may, however, be asked whether there is any external evidence to support Hausrath's, or any other partition theory. There is a little; for Polycarp, when he wrote to the Philippians in the first century A.D., speaks about St. Paul having written to them "in all his Epistles." Now, when he says "Epistles," is it only an exaggeration? Perhaps: but it is possible that Polycarp knew what he was talking about, and if the situation were the other way round and Polycarp's evidence was contrary to the theory of more Epistles than one, we should be told with some emphasis that we have no right to go behind the words of an early authority like Polycarp.

Can we form any reasonable idea as to why we should have two letters of St. Paul's telescoped together as we seem possibly to have in Philippians, and much more probably have in 2 Corinthians? I think that it can have happened in this way. Go back in imagination to the earliest days of Church history. Why did people value St. Paul's Epistles? Primarily because they thought that he

gave them good and valuable advice. Now, not every letter which you receive from important people is valuable for the sake of its contents. Therefore you can conclude that Paul wrote some things which in the opinion of his readers were of value and importance, and some things which they regarded as quite ephemeral. But if you go on further, you find that the time very soon came when St. Paul's memory was cherished, when everything he wrote was treasured up because it was Paul's, and quite apart from its contents. Well now, each Church to which Paul had ever written would have a little *dossier* of material, odds and ends from St. Paul, in addition to some more important letters. It would not be long before the churches began to exchange their collections. The Corinthians, Philippians, Romans and Colossians would send each other copies, for of course they would not send the originals. Just at that point, then, you get a reasonable sort of possibility that they would send a document which would contain not only the main letter which Paul had written, but also a copy, more or less continuously written out, of all the little fragments which were extant, and perhaps even some things which had got in by mistake which he had never written at all. This stage, when the Church exchanged documents, lasted only a short time. Very soon the process was completed, they had all exchanged all that they had, and thus you have the collection of the Pauline letters—the *Corpus Paulinum*—which we still possess. We have not got in the New Testament independent copies each going back to the Church to which they were originally sent, but we have got a copy of a collection of letters which emerged from the exchange of smaller collections, and that is a reasonable justification of any theories such as those current in connexion with the Epistles to the Corinthians, or Philippians, or the two recensions of Romans.

2. The Question of Date and Provenance.

These questions refer to the point in Paul's career at which *Philippians* was written. A few years ago I do not think any one would have been inclined to regard them as matters of importance, because we should all have said that if there was anything certain in the *Epistles* it was that the *Epistle to the Philippians* was written by Paul when he was in prison in Rome, and it is by no means clear that this is not the most probable view; but in the last few years we have had Deissmann and Albertz both suggesting with considerable force the theory that the *Epistle to Philippians* was written at Ephesus during an imprisonment which is not recorded in the *Acts of the Apostles*, but is alluded to in the *Epistle to the Corinthians*. So that there is now a serious question to discuss.

Let us begin by taking the case for Rome and noticing what are the points in its favour and the points against it. The points in its favour are that Paul certainly was in prison at Rome in some sense, and that he refers to himself in the *Epistle to the Philippians* as a prisoner. He says that he has become known "to the whole *Praetorium*"—whatever that means—and he refers to the Christians who belong to the "household of *Cæsar*." The family of *Cæsar* here is, of course, not the Imperial family, but the slaves who were attached in some sense to the Imperial household.

Those, then, are the three points in favour of the Roman hypothesis:—

- (1) The imprisonment in Rome;
- (2) The *Prætorium*;
- (3) The household of *Cæsar*.

The points against it are that on the whole the characteristics of the *Epistles* agree with the *Epistles to Corinthians* and the *Epistles to the Romans* rather than with the characteristics of the *Epistles to the Colossians*, which, if genuine,

was in all probability written either from Rome or, during his previous imprisonment, from Cæsarea.

Moreover, reading the Epistle to Philippians straight through, and then asking yourself when it was written, you would immediately say it was written towards the *end* of his imprisonment, when his trial was coming on at any moment and he was not at all certain how it was going to turn out. It has been described by German critics as being the last words of Paul when in prison. Obviously if this is so, it is awkward that it should agree in style and sentiment with Corinthians and Romans, rather than with Colossians which was written in Rome. Bishop Lightfoot, it is true, felt that difficulty and tried to overcome it by adopting the theory that Philippians was not written towards the end of his imprisonment, and that Colossians must be put further on, and in that way preserved the line of development. Even so the development is rather sudden, for it is only a difference of a few months between Philippians and Colossians, even if we attach some critics have also endeavoured to minimize the difficulty by quoting Philippians ii. 8 and urging that this after all agrees more with Colossians than with the earlier Epistles.

Let us now turn to the proposition that Paul was imprisoned at Ephesus and wrote Philippians then.

The advantages of this theory are that in this case we have Philippians written at the same time, roughly speaking, as the Epistles to which it has the greatest resemblance. It was written at the same place and at the same time as the Epistle to the Corinthians, and we have all the time we need between it and the Epistle to the Colossians. It is even possible to add to that, by pointing out that in Philippians ii. 19 St. Paul is trusting to send Timothy shortly to the Philippians, and that in Corinthians he refers to sending Timothy to Macedonia. In fact, if we had

known that this Epistle was written from Ephesus, this would have been put down as one of the most striking points of undesigned coincidence that we could have.

In going on to discuss the drawbacks of the theory it appears that their statement and discussion is made most plain by an attempt to answer the three following questions :—

(1) Can we show a reason for supposing Paul was imprisoned at Ephesus? (2) Can we explain a reference to the Prætorium in Ephesus? (3) Can we explain the Household of Cæsar as existing in Ephesus?

Imprisonment at Ephesus.—In answer to the first question, Deissmann and Albertz¹ say that Paul must have been imprisoned at Ephesus, because this is implied by 1 Corinthians xv. 32: “If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me?” That is not merely an uncomplimentary allusion to the inhabitants of Ephesus; for as a matter of fact the fighting with wild beasts was a form of execution which was often carried out. We are, it is true, sometimes told that that is nevertheless impossible here, since it could not have happened to Paul because he was a Roman citizen, and a Roman citizen could not be condemned to fight with beasts, and that in any case Luke would have mentioned it. But Luke reported events which he regarded as suitable for his purpose; he did not tell everything. He certainly omitted the intermediate visit to Corinth, and possibly he may have omitted some scene in which St. Paul came into conflict with the authorities and went to prison and was in danger of being condemned to the beasts. It is very easy to say that a Roman citizen could not be condemned to fight with beasts. Supposing they said, “We do not believe you are a Roman.” How do you know that St. Paul could

¹ *Theol. Studien und Kritiken*, 1910, pp. 551 ff.

prove it? How do you know he was always in a position to do so? Moreover, unless I am quite wrong, the exact meaning of the phrase in Corinthians is not that he did fight with beasts, but that there was a possibility of his doing so. It is obscure; but $\epsilon\iota$ with the aorist indicative often implies an unfulfilled condition. But fighting with beasts is in any case not a possibility unless the fighter has first been arrested and is in prison, and if the possibility existed it must imply the imprisonment of Paul.

If you turn to 2 Corinthians you will find that Paul refers to the extreme tribulation which he underwent in Ephesus. He says, among other things that he despaired of life itself. Deissmann and Albertz say that here we have a further allusion to imprisonment at Ephesus. But the difficulty must be admitted to exist whether it can be the same imprisonment referred to in "If I have fought with beasts," seeing that the writing of 1 Corinthians and other events come in between the two references.

The Prætorium.—It was, according to Albertz, Mommsen who, without knowing the connexion of the facts with an imprisonment in Ephesus which had not been yet suggested, first drew attention to the existence of *Prætoriani* in Ephesus as proved by an inscription given in Wood's discoveries at Ephesus. If, therefore, τὸ πραιτώριον be taken to refer to soldiers, there is no reason for not accepting Ephesus, and Albertz even argues that Ephesus is more probable than Rome because in Rome the whole Prætorian Body would be about 9,000 men, and it is improbable that Paul came into contact with so many, while in Ephesus there would be only a few Prætorians on special duty. If, however, τὸ πραιτώριον be taken as the translation of *Prætorium* in a local sense, Albertz is still ready to argue that this fits Ephesus. There is, he says, no satisfactory proof that Prætorium can mean either the Palace of the Cæsars or the

Castra Prætorianorum by the *Porta Viminalis* or anything similar. "It would more probably mean an Imperial Villa outside Rome, and would be peculiarly appropriate for the residence of a Governor. . . . The expression points not so much to the city of Rome as to the provinces, in which Governors were stationed. It therefore suits admirably a reference to Ephesus, the residence of a Governor of Asia." Thus whatever interpretation be given to τὸ πραιτώριον—and this is likely always to be disputed—Ephesus cannot be excluded as ruled out by this phrase.

The Household of Cæsar.—Obviously Rome is the most natural place in which to look for slaves attached to the Imperial Household, but here again Albertz shows that epigraphical evidence proves that the phrase would also have a natural meaning in Ephesus. Not only were there individuals belonging to this class, but they were even formed into societies—*collegia*—especially burial societies—and Albertz goes so far as to connect with this fact (I should think a little rashly) the existence in Ephesus of a phyle with the name "Imperial" (σεβαστή). Here, therefore, there is again quite good reason for saying that if an Ephesian imprisonment be granted there is no reason for refusing a hearing to the theory which suggests that *Philippians* was written from Ephesus, and so putting this Epistle into the same period as *Corinthians* and *Romans*, with which it has, on the whole, far more points of contact than with *Colossians* and *Ephesians*.

K. LAKE.