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Stylometrics and the Question of Interpolation in Paul



Some Analytical Possibilities for 2 Corinthians

2 Cor contains a number of conspicuous discontinuities. There is a dramatic and often noticed change of tone at **10:1**, when a straightforward letter turns defensive and angry. The following also invite attention:

- **6:14-7:1**, forbidding marriage to unbelievers, now separates 6:13 "In return I speak as to children widen your hearts also" and 7:2 :"Open your hearts to us; we have wronged no one."
- 2:12 "When I came to Troas to preach the Gospel of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord, but my mind could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia" joins perfectly with 7:5 "For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn fighting without and fear within. [4] But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus . . ." The intervening **2:13-7:4** is itself interpolated by 6:14-7:1. This implies an editorial process with more than one stage.

Such considerations led Strachan (1935) to arrange his 2 Cor commentary this way:

6:14-7:1. "A Fragment of an Earlier Letter"
 10:1-13:10. "The Severe Letter"
 11:1-6:13
 7:2-9:15
 13:11-14. "A letter from Macedonia"

The last of Strachan's segments refers to a previous letter of self-justification, the "severe letter." On this view, everything in 2 Cor is by Paul, but at least three letters were rearranged by Paul's editors. The motive is obvious: fewer letters are easier to read, and the negative effect of a harsh letter is mitigated if it is placed at the end.

Another aspect of 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 is that its advice on mixed marriage seems to differ from that of 1 Cor 7:12. For 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 as *anti*-Pauline, see Betz 1973.

Another conflation proposal for 2 Cor is in Arthur J Dewey et al, The Authentic Letters of Paul (2010):

2:14-6:13
7:2-4. "A Defense of Paul's Credibility"

10-13 entire. "A Parody of A Fool's Speech"

1:1-2:13
7:5-16. "A Letter of Reconciliation"

8 entire. "Collection Appeal to Corinth"

9 entire. "Collection Appeal to Achaia"

On the last two letters, see also Hans Dieter Betz's Hermeneia commentary on 2 Cor 8 and 9.

Not all conflation proposals confine themselves to 2 Cor. Johannes Weiss's 1910 proposal for "Letter A" consisted of 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 plus 1 Cor 10:1-23, 6:12-20, 9:24-27, 11:2-34, 16:7b-9, and 16:15-20.