

An Essay  
For the Understanding  
Of St. Paul's Epistles  
By Consulting St. Paul  
Himself

by  
John Locke<sup>1</sup>

(1632-1704)

*(Grammar updated to today's spelling)*

To go about to explain any of St. Paul's Epistles, after so great a Train of Expositors and Commentators, might seem an Attempt of Vanity, censurable for its Needlessness, did not the daily and approved Examples of pious and learned Men justify it. This may be some Excuse for me to the Public, if ever these following Papers should chance to come abroad: But to my self for whose Use this Work was undertaken, I need make no Apology. Though I had been conversant in these Epistles, as well as in other Parts of Sacred Scripture, yet I found that I understood them not; I mean the doctrinal and discursive parts of them: Though the practical Directions, which are usually dropped in the latter Part of each Epistle, appeared to me very plain, intelligible, and instructive.

I did not, when I reflected on it, very much wonder that this part of Sacred Scripture had Difficulties in it, many Causes of Obscurity did readily occur to me. The Nature of Epistolary Writings in general, disposes the Writer to pass by the mentioning of many Things, as well known to him to whom his Letter is address which are necessary to be laid open to a Stranger, to make him comprehend what is said: And it not seldom falls out, that a well Penned Letter which is very easy and intelligible to the Receiver, is very obscure to a Stranger, who hardly knows what to make of it. The Matters that St. Paul wrote about, were certainly things well known to those he wrote to, and which they had some peculiar Concern in which made them easily apprehend his Meaning, and see the Tendency and Force of his Discourse. But we having now at this distance no Information of the Occasion of his writing, little or no Knowledge of the Temper and Circumstances those he wrote to were in, but what is to be gathered out of the Epistles themselves, it is not strange that many things in them lie concealed to us, which no doubt they who were concerned in the Letter understood at first sight. Add to this, that in many places it is manifest he answers Letters sent, and Questions proposed to him, which if we had would much better clear those Passages that relate to them, than all the learned Notes of Critics and Commentators, who in after- times fill us with their Conjectures; for very often, as to the Matter in hand, they are nothing else.

---

<sup>1</sup> A paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul Vol. 1; Wainwright; pg. 103-116

The Language wherein these Epistles are written, are another; and that no small occasion of their Obscurity to us now: The Words are Greek; a Language dead many Ages since: A Language of a very witty volatile People, Seekers after Novelty, and abounding with Variety of Notions and Sects, to which they applied the Terms of their common Tongue with great Liberty and Variety: And yet this makes but one small part of the Difficulty in the Language of these Epistles; there is a Peculiarity in it, that much more obscures and perplexes the Meaning of these Writings, than what can be occasioned by the Looseness and Variety of the Greek Tongue. The Terms are Greek, but the Idiom or Turn of the Phrases may be truly said to be Hebrew or Syriac.<sup>2</sup> The Custom and Familiarity of which Tongues do sometimes so far influence the Expressions in these Epistles, that one may observe the Force of the Hebrew Conjugations, particularly that of Hiphil<sup>3</sup> given to Greek Verbs, in a way unknown to the Grecians themselves.' Nor is this all; the Subject treated of in these Epistles is so wholly new, and the Doctrines contained in them so perfectly remote from the Notions that Mankind were acquainted with, that most of the important Terms in it have quite another Signification from what they have in other Discourses: So that putting all together, we may truly say, that the New Testament is a Book written in a Language peculiar to it self.

To these Causes of Obscurity common to St. Paul, with most of the other Penmen of the several Books of the New Testament we may add those that are peculiarly his, and owing to his Style and Temper. He was, as it is visible, a Man of quick Thought, warm Temper, mighty well versed in the Writings of the Old Testament, and full of the Doctrine of the New: All this put together, suggested Matter to him in abundance on those Subjects which came in his way: So that one may consider him when he was writing, as beset with a Crowd of Thoughts, all striving for Utterance. In this Posture of Mind it was almost impossible for him to keep that slow Pace, and observe minutely that Order and Method of ranging all he said, from which results an easy and obvious Perspicuity.<sup>4</sup> To this Plenty and Vehemence of his may be imputed those many large Parentheses which a careful Reader may observe in his Epistles. Upon this account also it is, that he often breaks off in the Middle of an Argument, to let in some new Thought suggested by his own Words; which having pursued and explained as far as conduced to his present Purpose, he reassumes again the Thread of his Discourse, and goes on with it, without taking any notice that he returns again to what he had been before saying, though sometimes it be so far of that it may well have slipped out of his Mind, and requires a very attentive Reader to observe, and so bring the disjointed Members together, as to make up the Connection, and see how the scattered Parts of the Discourse hang together in a coherent well-agreeing Sense, that makes it all of a Piece.

Besides the disturbance in perusing St. Paul's Epistles, from the Plenty and Vivacity

---

<sup>2</sup> Syriac is probably intended to include Aramaic as well as Syriac.

<sup>3</sup> Hiphil is the name given to the causative active form of the Hebrew verb, which can mean either 'to cause to be...' or 'to declare to be...' For example the Hiphil of the verb 'to be righteous' can mean either 'to cause to be righteous' or 'to declare to be righteous,' a feature of the Hebrew which is important for the discussion of Paul's use of the Greek δικαιοῦ dikaioo (to justify).

<sup>4</sup> Clearness of statement or exposition; freedom from obscurity or ambiguity; lucidity.

of his Thoughts, which may obscure his Method, and often hide his Sense from an unwary, or over-hasty Reader; the frequent changing of the Personage he speaks in, renders the Sense very uncertain, and is apt to mislead one that has not some Clue to guide him; sometimes by the Pronoun 'I,' he means himself; sometimes any Christian; sometimes a Jew, and sometimes any Man, etc. If speaking of himself in the first Person Singular has so various meanings; his use of the first Person Plural is with a far greater Latitude, sometimes designing himself alone, sometimes those with himself whom he makes Partners to the Epistle; sometimes with himself comprehending the other Apostles, or Preachers of the Gospel, or Christians: Nay, sometimes he in that way speaks of the Converted Jews, other times of the Converted Gentiles, and sometimes of others, in a more or less extended Sense, every one of which varies the meaning of the Place, and makes it to be differently understood. I have forbore to trouble the Reader with Examples of them here. If his own Observation path not already furnished him with them, the following Paraphrase and Notes I suppose will satisfy him in the point.

In the current also of his Discourse, he sometimes drops in the Objections of others, and his Answers to them, without any Change in the Scheme of his Language, that might give Notice of any other speaking besides himself. This requires great Attention to observe, and yet if it be neglected or overlooked, will make the Reader very much mistake, and misunderstand his Meaning, and render the Sense very perplexed.

These are intrinsic difficulties arising from the Text it self, whereof there might be a great many other named as the uncertainty, sometimes, who are the Persons he speaks to, or the Opinions or Practices which he has in his Eye, sometimes in alluding to them, sometimes in his Exhortations and Reproofs. But those above mentioned being the chief it may suffice to have opened our Eyes a little upon them, which, well examined, may contribute towards our Discovery of the rest.

To these we may subjoin two external Causes that have made no small increase of the Native and Original Difficulties that keep us from an easy and assured Discovery of St. Paul's Sense, in many parts of his Epistles, and those are:

First, The dividing of them into Chapters and Verses, as we have done, whereby they are so chopped and minced, and as they are now Printed stand so broken and divided, that not only the Common People take the Verses usually for distinct Aphorisms,<sup>5</sup> but even Men of more advanced Knowledge in reading them, lose very much of the strength and force of the Coherence, and the Light that depends on it. Our Minds are so weak and narrow, that they have need of all the helps and assistances can be procured, to lay before them undisturbedly, the Thread and Coherence of any Discourse; by which alone they are truly improved and lead into the Genuine Sense of the Author. When the Eye is constantly disturbed with loose Sentences, that by their standing and separation, appear as so many distinct Fragments; the Mind will have much ado to take in, and carry on in its Memory an uniform Discourse of dependent Reasoning's, especially having from the Cradle been used to wrong Impressions concerning them, and constantly accustomed to hear them quoted as

---

<sup>5</sup> Any principle or precept expressed in few words; a short pithy sentence containing a truth of general import; a maxim.

distinct Sentences, without any limitation or explication of their precise Meaning from the Place they stand in, and the Relation they bear to what goes before, or follows. These Divisions also have given occasion to the reading these Epistles by parcels and in scraps, which has farther confirmed the Evil arising from such partitions. And I doubt not but every one will confess it to be a very unlikely way to come to the Understanding of any other Letters, to read them Piecemeal a Bit to day, and another Scrap to morrow, and so on by broken Intervals; Especially if the Pause and Cessation should be made as the Chapters the Apostles Epistles are divided into do end sometimes in the middle of a Discourse, and sometimes in the middle of a Sentence. It cannot therefore but be wondered that that should be permitted to be done to Holy Writ, which would visibly disturb the Sense, and hinder the Understanding of any other Book whatsoever. If Tully's Epistles<sup>6</sup> were so printed; and so used, I ask whither they would not be much harder to be understood, less easy and less pleasant to be read by much than now they are?

How plain so ever this Abuse is, and what Prejudice so ever it does to the Understanding of the Sacred Scripture, yet if a Bible was printed as it should be, and as the several Parts of it were written, in continued Discourses where the Argument is continued, I doubt not but the several Parties would complain of it, as an Innovation, and a dangerous Change in the publishing those holy Books. And indeed those who are for maintaining their Opinions, and the Systems of Parties by Sound of Words, with a Neglect of the true Sense of Scripture, would have reason to make and foment the Outcry. They would most of them be immediately disarmed of their great Magazine of Artillery wherewith they defend themselves, and fall upon others, if the Holy Scripture were but laid before the Eyes of Christians in its due Connection and Consistency, it would not then be so easy to snatch out a few Words, as if they were separate from the rest, to serve a Purpose, to which they do not at all belong, and with which they have nothing to do. But as the matter now stands, he that has a mind to it, may at a cheap rate be a notable Champion for the Truth, that is, for the Doctrines of the Sect that Chance or Interest has cast him into. He need but be furnished with Verses of Sacred Scripture, containing Words and Expressions that are but flexible (as all general obscure and doubtful ones are) and his System that has appropriated them to the Orthodoxy of his Church, makes them immediately strong and irrefragable Arguments for his Opinion. This is the Benefit of loose Sentences, and Scripture crumbled into Verses, which quickly turn into independent Aphorisms. But if the Quotation in the Verse produced, were considered as a part of a continued coherent Discourse, and so its Sense were limited by the Tenor of the Context, most of these forward and warm Disputants would be quite striped of those, which they doubt not now to call Spiritual Weapons, and they would have often nothing to say that would not show their Weakness, and manifestly fly in their Faces. I crave leave to set down a Saying of the Learned and Judicious Mr. Selden,<sup>7</sup> 'In interpreting the Scripture, says he, many do as if a Man should see one have Ten Pounds, which he reckoned by I, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. meaning Four was but four Unites, and five five Unites, etc. and that he had in all but Ten

---

<sup>6</sup> The Epistles of Marcus Tullius Cicero.

<sup>7</sup> John Selden (1584-1654) *Table Talk*

Pounds: 'The other that sees him, takes not the Figures together, as he doth, but picks here 'and there; and thereupon reports that he had five Pounds in one Bag, and six Pounds in another Bag, and nine Pounds in another Bag, etc. when as in truth 'he has but ten Pounds in all. So we pick out a Text here and there, to make it serve 'our turn;' whereas if we take it altogether, and consider what went before, and what followed after, we should find it meant no such thing. I have heard sober Christians very much admire why ordinary illiterate People, who were Professors, that showed a Concern for Religion, seemed much more conversant in St. Paul's Epistles, than in the plainer, and as it seemed to them much more intelligible Parts of the New Testament; They confessed that though they read St. Paul's Epistles with their best Attention, yet they generally found them too hard to be mastered, and they labored in vain so far to reach the Apostle's Meaning all along in the Train of what he said, as to read them with that Satisfaction that arises from a feeling that we understand and fully comprehend the Force and Reasoning of an Author; and therefore they could not imagine what those saw in them, whose Eyes they thought not much better than their own. But the Case was plain, These sober inquisitive Readers had a mind to see nothing in St. Paul's Epistles but just what he meant; whereas those others of a quicker and gayer Sight could see in them what they pleased Nothing is more acceptable to Fancy than plain Terms and Expressions that are not obstinate, in such it can find its account with Delight, and with them be illuminated Orthodox, infallible at pleasure, and in its own way. But where the Sense of the Author goes visibly in its own Train, and the Words, receiving a determined Sense from their Companions and Adjacents, will not consent to give Countenance and Color to what is agreed to be right, and must be supported at any rate, there Men of established Orthodoxy do not so well find their Satisfaction. And perhaps if it were well examined it would be no very extravagant Paradox to say, that there are fewer that bring their Opinions to the Sacred Scripture to be tried by that infallible Rule, than bring the Sacred Scripture to their Opinions, to bend it to them, to make it as they can a Cover and Guard of them. And to this Purpose its being divided into Verses, and brought as much as may be into loose and general Aphorisms, makes it most useful and serviceable. And in this lies the other great Cause of Obscurity and Perplexedness, which has been cast upon St. Paul's Epistles from without.

[Second] St. Paul's Epistles, as they stand translated in our English Bibles, are now by long and constant Use become a part of the English Language, and common Phraseology, especially in Matters of Religion; This every one uses familiarly, and thinks he understands, but it must be observed, that if he has a distinct meaning when he uses those Words and Phrases, and knows himself what he intends by them, it is always according to the Sense of his own System, and the Articles or Interpretations of the Society he is engaged in. So that all this Knowledge and Understanding which he has in the Use of these Passages of Sacred Scripture, reaches no farther than this, that he knows (and that is very well) what he himself says, but thereby knows nothing at all what St. Paul said in them. The Apostle wrote not by that Man's System, and so his Meaning cannot be known by it. This being the ordinary way of understanding the Epistles, and every Sect being per-

fectly Orthodox in its own Judgment: What a great and invincible Darkness must this cast upon St. Paul's Meaning to all those of that way, in all those Places where his Thoughts and Sense run counter to what any Party has espoused for Orthodox; as it must unavoidably to all but one of the different Systems, in all those Passages that any way relate to the Points in Controversies between them.

This is a Mischief which, however frequent and almost naturist reaches so far, that it would justly make all those who depend upon them, wholly different of Commentators, and let them see, how little Help was to be expected from them in relying on them for the true Sense of the Sacred Scripture, did they not take care to help to cozen<sup>8</sup> themselves, by choosing to use and pin their Faith on such Expositors as explain the Sacred Scripture in favor of those Opinions that they before hand have voted Orthodox, and bring to the Sacred Scripture not for Trial, but Confirmation. No Body can think that any Text of St. Paul's Epistles has two contrary Meanings, and yet so it must have to two different Men, who taking two Commentators of different Sects for their respective Guides into the Sense of any one of the Epistles, shall build upon their respective Expositions. We need go no further for a Proof of it, than the Notes of the two Celebrated Commentators on the New Testament, Dr. Hammond and Beza, both Men of Parts and Learning, and both thought by their Followers Men mighty in the Sacred Scriptures. So that here we see the hopes of great Benefit and Light from Expositors and Commentators, is in a great part abated and those who have most need of their help, can receive but little from them, and can have very little Assurance of reaching the Apostle's Sense by what they find in them, whilst Matters remain in the same State they are in at present. For those, who find they need Help, and would borrow Light from Expositors, either consult only those who have the good luck to be thought sound and Orthodox, avoiding those of different Sentiments from themselves in the great and approved Points of their Systems, as dangerous and not fit to be meddled with; or else with Indifferency look into the Notes of all Commentators promiscuously. The first of these take Pains only to confirm themselves in the Opinions and Tenants they have already, which whether it be the way to get the true Meaning of what St. Paul delivered, is easy to determine. The others with much more Fairness to themselves, though with reaping little more Advantage (unless they have something else to guide them into the Apostle's Meaning than the Comments themselves) seek Help on all hands, and refuse not to be taught by any one, who offers to enlighten them in any of the dark Passages. But here though they avoid the Mischief which the others fall into, of being confined in their Sense, and seeing nothing but that in St. Paul's Writings, be it right or wrong; yet they run into as great on the other side, and instead of being confirmed in the meaning, that they thought they saw in the Text, are distracted with an hundred suggested by those they advised with; and so instead of that one Sense of the Scripture which they carried with them to their Commentators, return from them with none at all.

This indeed seems to make the Case desperate: For if the Comments and Expositions of pious and learned Men cannot be depended on, whether shall we go for Help? To which I answer, I would not be mistaken, as if I thought the Labors of the Learned in this

---

<sup>8</sup>To cheat, defraud by deceit.

Case wholly lost, and fruitless. There is great Use and Benefit to be made of them, when we have once got a Rule to know which of their Expositions, in the great Variety there is of them, explains the Words and Phrases according to the Apostle's Meaning. Till then it is evident, from what is above said they serve for the most part to no other Use, but either to make us find our own Sense, and not his in St. Paul's Words; or else to find in them no settled Sense at all.

## **Rules to Understand St. Paul's Writings**

Here it will be asked how shall we come by this Rule you mention? Where is that Touchstone to be had that will show us whether the Meaning we our selves put, or take as put by others upon St. Paul's Words in his Epistles, be truly his Meaning or no? I will not say the way which I propose, and have in the following Paraphrase followed, will make us infallible in our Interpretations of the Apostle's Text: But this I will own, that till I took this way, St. Paul's Epistles to me, in the ordinary way of reading and studying them, were very obscure Parts of Scripture, that left me almost every where at a loss; and I was at a great Uncertainty in which of the contrary Senses, that were to be found in his Commentators, he was to be taken. Whether what I have done has made it any clearer and more visible now, I must leave others to judge. This I beg leave to say for my self, that if some very sober judicious Christians, no Strangers to the Sacred Scriptures, nay learned Divines of the Church of England, had not professed that by the Perusal of these following Papers, they understood the Epistles better much than they did before, and had not with repeated Instances pressed me to publish them, I should not have consented they should have gone beyond my own private Use, for which they were at first designed and where they made me not repent my Pains.

If any one be so far pleased with my Endeavours, as to think it worth while to be informed, what was the Clue I guided my self by through all the dark Passages of these Epistles, I shall minutely tell him the Steps by which I was brought into this way, that he may judge whether I proceeded rationally, upon right Grounds or no, if so be any thing in so mean an Example as mine may be worth his notice.

After I had found by long Experience, that the reading of the Text and Comments in the ordinary way proved not so successful as I wished to the end proposed I began to suspect that in reading a Chapter as was usual and thereupon sometimes consulting Expositors upon some hard Places of it, which at that time most affected me, as relating to Points then under Consideration in my own Mind, or in Debate amongst others, was not a right Method to get into the true Sense of these Epistles. I saw plainly, after I began once to reflect on it, that if any one now should write me a Letter, as long as St. Paul's to the Romans, concerning such a Matter as that is, in a Style as Foreign, and Expressions as dubious as his seem to be, if I should divide it into fifteen or sixteen Chapters, and read of them one to day, and another to morrow, etc. it was ten to one I should never come to a full and clear Comprehension of it The way to understand the Mind of him that wrote it, every one would agree, was to read the whole Letter through from one end to the other, all at once, to see what was the main Subject and Tendency of it: or if it had several Views

and Purposes in it, not dependent one of another, nor in a Subordination to one chief Aim and End, to discover what those different Matters were, and where the Author concluded one, and began another; and if there were any Necessity of dividing the Epistle into Parts, to make the Boundaries of them.

In Prosecution of this Thought, I concluded it necessary, for the understanding of any one of St. Paul's Epistles, to read it all through at one Sitting, and to observe as well as I could the Drift and Design of his writing it. If the first reading gave me some Light, the second gave me more; and so I persisted on reading constantly the whole Epistle over at once, till I came to have a good general View of the Apostle's main Purpose in writing the Epistle, the chief Branches of his Discourse wherein he prosecuted it, the Arguments he used, and the Disposition of the whole.

This, I confess, is not to be obtained by one or two hasty Readings; it must be repeated again and again, with a close Attention to the Tenor of the Discourse, and a perfect Neglect of the Divisions into Chapters and Verses. On the contrary, the safest way is to suppose, that the Epistle has but one Business, and one Aim, till by a frequent Perusal of it, you are forced to see there are distinct independent Matters in it, which will forwardly enough show themselves.

It requires so much more Pains, Judgment and Application, to find the Coherence of obscure and abstruse Writings, and makes them so much the more unfit to serve Prejudice and Preoccupation when found, that it is not to be wondered that St. Paul's Epistles have with many passed rather for disjointed, loose pious Discourses, full of Warmth and Zeal, and Overflows of Light, rather than for calm strong coherent Reasoning's, that carried a Thread of Argument and Consistency all through them.

But this muttering of lazy or ill disposed Readers, hindered me not from persisting in the Course I had began; I continued to read the same Epistle over and over, and over again, till I came to discover, as appeared to me, what was the Drift and Aim of it, and by what Steps and Arguments St. Paul prosecuted his Purpose. I remembered that St. Paul was miraculously called to the Ministry of the Gospel, and declared to be a chosen Vessel; that he had the whole Doctrine of the Gospel from God by immediate Revelation, and was appointed to be the Apostle of the Gentiles, for the propagating of it in the Heathen World. This was enough to persuade me, that he was not a Man of loose and shattered Parts, incapable to argue, and unfit to convince those he had to deal with. God knows how to choose fit Instruments for the Business he employs them in. A large Stock of Jewish Learning he had taken in at the Feet of Gamaliel's and for his Information in Christian Knowledge, and the Mysteries and Depths of the Dispensation of Grace by Jesus Christ, God himself had condescended to be his Instructor and Teacher. The Light of the Gospel he had received from the Fountain and Father of Light himself, who, I concluded, had not furnished him in this extraordinary manner, if all this plentiful Stock of Learning and Illumination had been in danger to have been lost or proved useless, in a jumbled and confused Head; nor have laid up such a Store of admirable and useful Knowledge in a Man, who for want of Method and Order, Clearness of Conception, or Pertinency<sup>9</sup> in

---

<sup>9</sup> The quality of being pertinent or pertaining to the matter in hand; relevancy; appositeness.

Discourse, could not draw it out into Use with the greatest Advantages of Force and Coherence. That he knew how to prosecute his Purpose with Strength of Argument and close Reasoning, without incoherent Sallies, or the intermixing of things foreign to his Business, was evident to me from several Speeches of his recorded in the Acts: And it was hard to think that a Man that could talk with so much Consistency and Clearness of Conviction, should not be able to write without Confusion, inextricable Obscurity, and perpetual Rambling. The Force, Order and Perspicuity<sup>10</sup> of those Discourses could not be denied to be very visible. How then came it that the like was thought much wanting in his Epistles? and of this there appeared to me this plain Reason: The Particularities of the History in which these Speeches are inserted, showed St. Paul's end in Speaking, which being seen, casts a Light on the whole, and shows the Pertinency of all that he says. But his Epistles not being so circumstantiated; there being no concurring History that plainly declares the Disposition St. Paul was in, what the Actions, Expectations, or Demands of those to whom he wrote, required him to speak to, we are no where told. All this and a great deal more necessary to guide us into the true meaning of the Epistles, is to be had only from the Epistles themselves, and to be gathered from thence with stubborn Attention, and more than common Application.

This being the only safe Guide (under the Spirit of God, that dictated these Sacred Writings) that can be relied on, I hope I may be excused, if I venture to say, that the utmost ought to be done to observe and trace out St. Paul's Reasonings; to follow the Thread of his Discourse in each of his Epistles; to show how it goes on still directed with the same View, and pertinently drawing the several Incidents towards the same Point. To understand him right, his Inferences should be strictly observed; and it should be carefully examined from what they are drawn, and what they tend to. He is certainly a coherent, argumentative, pertinent Writer, and Care I think should be taken in expounding of him, to show that he is so. But though I say he has weighty Aims in his Epistles, which he steadily keeps in his Eye, and drives at in all that he says, yet I do not say that he puts his Discourses into an artificial Method, or leads his Reader into a Distinction of his Arguments, or gives them notice of new Matter by Rhetorical or studied Transitions. He has no Ornaments borrowed from the Greek Eloquence; no Notions of their Philosophy mixed with his Doctrine to set it off. The enticing Words of Man's Wisdom, whereby he means all the studied Rules of the Grecian Schools, which made them such Masters in the Art of Speaking, he, as he says himself in I Cor. 2:4 wholly neglected. The Reason whereof he gives in the next Verse, and in other places. But though Politeness of Language, Delicacy of Style, Fineness of Expression, labored Periods, artificial Transitions, and a very methodical ranging of the Parts with such other Embellishments as make a Discourse enter the Mind smoothly, and strike the Fancy at first hearing, have little or no place in his Style, yet Coherence of Discourse, and a direct Tendency of all the Parts of it, to the Argument in hand, are most eminently to be found in him. This I take to be his Character, and doubt not but he will be found to be so upon diligent Examination. And in this if it be so, we have a Clue, if we will take the Pains to find it, that will conduct us with Surety through those seemingly dark

---

<sup>10</sup> Transparency, translucency.

Places, and imagined Intricacies in which Christians have wandered so far one from another, as to find quite contrary Senses.

Whether a superficial Reading, accompanied with the common Opinion of his invincible Obscurity, has kept off some from seeking in him the Coherence of a Discourse tending with close strong reasoning to a Point; Or a seemingly more honorable Opinion of one that had been wrapped up into the Third Heaven, as if from a Man so warmed and illuminated as he had been, nothing could be expected but Flashes of Light, and Raptures of Zeal hindered others to look for a Train of Reasoning, proceeding on regular and cogent Argumentation from a Man raised above the ordinary pitch of Humanity to an higher and brighter way of Illumination; Or else whether others were loath to beat their Heads about the Tenor and Coherence in St. Paul's Discourses, which if found out, possibly might set him at a manifest and irreconcilable Difference with their Systems, it is certain that whatever hath been the Cause, this way of getting the true Sense of St. Paul's Epistles, seems not to have been much made use of or at least so thoroughly pursued as I am apt to think it deserves.

For, granting that he was full stored with the Knowledge of the things he treated of For he had Light from Heaven, it was God himself furnished him, and he could not want: Allowing also that he had Ability to make use of the Knowledge had been given him for the end for which it was given him, viz. the Information, Conviction, and Conversion of others; and accordingly that he knew how to direct his Discourse to the Point in hand, we cannot widely mistake the Parts of his Discourse employed about it, when we have any where found out the Point he drives at: Wherever we have got a View of his Design, and the Aim he proposed to himself in Writing, we may be sure that such or such an Interpretation does not give us his genuine Sense, it being nothing at all to his present purpose. Nay among various Meanings given a Text, it fails not to direct us to the best, and very often to assure us of the true. For it is no Presumption, when one sees a Man arguing for this or that Proposition, if he be a sober Man, Master of Reason or common Sense, and takes any care of what he says, to pronounce with Confidence in several Cases, that he could not talk thus or thus.

I do not yet so magnify this Method of studying St. Paul's Epistles, as well as other Parts of Sacred Scripture, as to think it will perfectly clear every hard Place, and leave no Doubt unresolved. I know Expressions now out of use, Opinions of those times, not heard of in our days, Allusions to Customs lost to us, and various Circumstances and Particularities of the Parties, which we cannot come at, etc. must needs continue several Passages in the dark now to us at this distance, which shone with full Light to those they were directed to. But for all that the studying of St. Paul's Epistles in the way I have proposed, will, I humbly conceive, carry us a great length in the right understanding of them, and make us rejoice in the Light we receive from those most useful Parts of Divine Revelation, by furnishing us with visible Grounds that we are not mistaken, whilst the Consistency of the Discourse, and the Pertinency of it to the Design he is upon, vouches it worthy of our great Apostle. At least I hope it may be my Excuse for having endeavored to make St. Paul an Interpreter to me of his own Epistles.

To this may be added another Help which St. Paul himself affords us towards the attaining the true meaning contained in his Epistles. He that reads him with the Attention I propose, will easily observe, that as he was full of the Doctrine of the Gospel, so it lay all clear and in order open to his view. When he gave his Thoughts Utterance upon any Point, the Matter flowed like a Torrent, but it is plain it was a Matter he was perfectly Master of: he fully possessed the entire Revelation he had received from God had thoroughly digested it; all the Parts were formed together in his Mind into one well contracted harmonious Body. So that he was no way at Uncertainty, nor ever in the least at a loss concerning any Branch of it. One may see his Thoughts were all of a piece in all his Epistles, his Notions were at all times uniform, and constantly the same, though his Expressions very various. In them he seems to take great Liberty. This at least is certain, that no one seems less tied up to a Form of Words. If then having by the Method before proposed got into the Sense of the several Epistles, we will but compare what he says, in the Places where he treats of the same Subject, we can hardly be mistaken in his Sense, nor doubt what it was, that he believed and taught concerning those Points of the Christian Religion. I know it is not unusual to find a Multitude of Texts heaped up for the maintaining of an espoused Proposition, but in a Sense often so remote from their true Meaning, that one can hardly avoid thinking that those who so used them, either sought not or valued not the Sense; and were satisfied with the Sound where they could but get that to favor them. But a verbal Concordance leads not always to Texts of the same meaning; trusting too much thereto, will furnish us but with slight Proofs in many Cases, and any one may observe how apt that is to jumble together Passages of Scripture not relating to the same Matter, and thereby to disturb and unsettle the true meaning of Holy Scripture.

I have therefore said that we should compare together Places of Scripture treating of the same Point. Thus indeed one part of the Sacred Text could not fail to give light unto another. And since the Providence of God hath so ordered it, that St. Paul has written a great Number of Epistles, which though upon different Occasions, and to several Purposes, yet are all confined within the Business of his Apostleship, and so contain nothing but Points of Christian Instruction, amongst which he seldom fails to drop in, and often to enlarge on the great and distinguishing Doctrines of our holy Religion; which, if quitting our own Infallibility in that Analogy of Faith which we have made to our selves, or have implicitly adopted from some other, we would carefully lay together, and diligently compare and study, I am apt to think would give us St. Paul's System in a clear and indisputable Sense, which every one must acknowledge to be a better Standard to interpret his Meaning by, in any obscure and doubtful Parts of his Epistles, if any such should still remain, than the System, Confession, or Articles of any Church or Society of Christians yet known, which however pretended to be founded on Scripture, are visibly the Contrivances of Men' (fallible both in their Opinions and Interpretations) and as is visible in most of them, made with partial Views, and adapted to what the Occasions of that time, and the present Circumstances they were then in, were thought to require for the Support or Justification of themselves.

Their Philosophy also has its part in misleading Men from the true Sense of the

Sacred Scripture. He that shall attentively read the Christian Writers after the Age of the Apostles, will easily find how much the Philosophy they were tinctured<sup>11</sup> with, influenced them in their Understanding of the Books of the Old and New Testament. In the Ages wherein Platonism prevailed, the Converts to Christianity of that School, on all occasions, interpreted Holy Writ according to the Notions they had imbibed from that Philosophy. Aristotle's Doctrine had the same effect in its turn, and when it degenerated into the Peripateticism<sup>12</sup> of the Schools, that too brought its Notions and Distinctions into Divinity, and affixed them to the Terms of the Sacred Scripture. And we may see still how at this day every ones Philosophy regulates every ones Interpretation of the Word of God. Those who are possessed with the Doctrine of Aerial and Ethereal Vehicles, have thence borrowed an Interpretation of the Four first Verses of 2 Cor. 5<sup>13</sup> (See Appendix A) without having any Ground to think that St. Paul had the least Notion of any such Vehicles. It is plain that the teaching of Men Philosophy was no part of the Design of Divine Revelation; but that the Expressions of Scripture are commonly suited in those Matters to the Vulgar Apprehensions and Conceptions of the Place and People where they were delivered. And as to the Doctrine therein directly taught by the Apostles, that tends wholly to the setting up the Kingdom of Jesus Christ in this World and the Salvation of Men's Souls, and in this it is plain their Expressions were conformed to the Ideas and Notions which they had received from Revelation, or were consequent from it. We shall therefore in vain go about to interpret their Words by the Notions of our Philosophy, and the Doctrines of Men delivered in our Schools. This is to explain the Apostles a meaning by what they never thought of while they were writing, which is not the way to find their Sense in what they delivered, but our own, and to take up from their Writings not what they left there for us, but what we bring along with us in our selves. He that would understand St. Paul right, must understand his Terms in the Sense he uses them, and not as they are appropriated by each Man's particular Philosophy, to Conceptions that never entered the Mind of the Apostle. For Example, he that shall bring the Philosophy now taught and received to the explaining of Spirit, Soul, and Body, mentioned I Thess. 5:23<sup>14</sup> will I fear hardly reach St. Paul's Sense, or represent to himself the Notions St. Paul then had in his Mind. That is what we should aim at in reading him, or any other Author, and till we from his Words paint his very Ideas and Thoughts in our Minds, we do not understand him.

In the Divisions I have made, I have endeavored the best I could to govern my self by the Diversity of Matter. But in a Writer like St. Paul, it is not so easy always to find precisely where one Subject ends, and another begins. He is full of the Matter he treats and writes with Warmth, which usually neglects Method, and those Partitions and Pauses

---

<sup>11</sup> Imbued with a tincture or colour; having a tincture (esp. of a specified kind); dyed, coloured, stained, tinged.

<sup>12</sup> The Peripatetic system of philosophy.

<sup>13</sup> KJV 2 Cor. 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: 3 If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. 4 For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

<sup>14</sup> But, the God of peace himself, hallow you completely, and, entire, might your spirit, and soul, and body,—*so as to be* unblameable in the Presence of our Lord Jesus Christ,—be preserved!

which Men educated in the Schools of Rhetoricians usually observe. Those Arts of Writing St. Paul, as well out of Design as Temper, wholly laid by: The Subject he had in hand, and the Grounds upon which it stood firm, and by which he enforced it, was what alone he minded; and without solemnly winding up one Argument, and intimating any way that he began another, let his Thoughts, which were fully possessed of the Matter, run in one continued Train, wherein the Parts of his Discourse were wove one into another. So that it is seldom that the Scheme of his Discourse makes any Gap; and therefore without breaking in upon the Connection of his Language, it is hardly possible to separate his Discourse, and give a distinct View of his several Arguments in distinct Sections.

I am far from pretending Infallibility in the Sense I have any where given in my Paraphrase or Notes; That would be to erect my self into an Apostle, a Presumption of the highest Nature in any one that cannot confirm what he says by Miracles. I have for my own Information sought the true Meaning as far as my poor Abilities would reach. And I have unbiasedly embraced what upon a fair Enquiry appeared so to me. This I thought my Duty and Interest in a Matter of so great Concernment to me. If I must believe for my self, it is unavoidable that I must understand for my self. For if I blindly and with an Implicit Faith take the Pope's Interpretation of the Sacred Scripture, without examining whether it be Christ's Meaning, it is the Pope I believe in, and not in Christ; it is his Authority I rest upon; it is what he says I embrace: For what it is Christ says, I neither know nor concern my self. It is the same thing when I set up any other Man in Christ's place, and make him the Authentic Interpreter of Sacred Scripture to my self. He may possibly understand the Sacred Scripture as right as any Man, but I shall do well to examine my self whether that which I do not know, nay (which in the way I take) I can never know, can justify me in making my self his Disciple, instead of Jesus Christ's, who of Right is alone and ought to be my only Lord and Master and it will be no less Sacrilege in me to substitute to my self any other in his room, to be a Prophet, to me, than to be my King or Priest.

The same Reasons that put me upon doing what I have in these Papers done, will exempt me from all Suspicion of imposing my Interpretation on others. The Reasons that lead me into the Meaning which prevailed on my Mind, are set down with it; as far as they carry Light and Conviction to any other Man's Understanding, so far I hope my Labor may be of some Use to him; beyond the Evidence it carries with it, I advise him not to follow mine, nor any Man's Interpretation. We are all Men liable to Errors, and infected with them; but have this sure way to preserve our selves every one from danger by them, if laying aside Sloth, Carelessness, Prejudice, Party, and a Reverence of Men, we betake our selves in earnest to the Study of the way to Salvation, in those holy Writings wherein God has revealed it from Heaven, and proposed it to the World seeking our Religion where we are sure it is in Truth to be found, comparing spiritual things with spiritual things.

## Appendix A

### *Locke Paraphrase for 2 Cor. 5:1-9:*

For I know that if this my body which is but as a tent for my sojourning here upon earth for a short time were dissolved I shall have an other of a divine original which shall not, like buildings made with men's hands, be subject to decay but shall be eternal in the heaven. For in his tabernacle I groan earnestly desiring, without putting off this mortal earthly body by death, to have that celestial body super induced, If so be the coming of Christ shall overtake me in this life before I put off this body. For we that are in the body groan under the pressures and inconveniencies that attend us in it, which yet we are not therefore willing to put off but had rather without dying have it changed<sup>15</sup> into a celestial immortal body, that so this mortal state may be put an end to by an immediate entrance into an immortal life. Now it is God who prepares and fits us for this immortal state, who also gives us the spirit as a pledge<sup>16</sup> of it. Wherefore being always undaunted and knowing that whilst I dwell or sojourn in this body I am absent from my proper home which is with the Lord (for I regulate my conduct not by the enjoyment of the visible things of this world but by my hope and expectation of the invisible things of the world to come) I with boldness preach the gospel, preferring in my choice the quitting this habitation to get home to the Lord wherefore I make this my only aim whither staying here in this body or departing<sup>17</sup> out of it so to acquit my self as to be acceptable to him.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> The same that he had told them in the first Epistle 15:51. I should happen to those who should be alive at Christ's coming. This I must own is not a very easy passage, whither we understand by γυμνος, 'naked' as I do here the state of the dead unclothed with immortal bodies until the resurrection which sense is favored by the same word 1 Cor. 15:37 or whither we understand the clothing upon, which the Apostle desires, to be those immortal bodies which souls shall be clothed with at the resurrection which sense of clothing upon seems to be favored by 1 Cor. 15:53-54, and is that which one should be inclined to, were it not accompanied with this difficulty viz that then it would follow that the wicked should not have immortal bodies at the resurrection. For what ever it be that St. Paul here means by being 'clothed upon:' it is some thing that is peculiar to the saints, who have the spirit of God, and shall be with the Lord in contradistinction to others as appears from the following verses and the whole tenor of this place.

<sup>16</sup> The spirit is mentioned in more places than one as the pledge and earnest of immortality; more particularly Eph. 1:13-14 which compared with Rom 8:23 shows that the inheritance whereof the spirit is the earnest is the same which the Apostle speaks of here viz. the possession of immortal bodies.

<sup>17</sup> Εἴτε ἐνδημοῦντες εἴτε ἐκδημοῦντες, *whether staying in the body or going out of it*, whither I am to stay longer here, or suddenly to depart. This sense the foregoing verse leads us to and what he says in this verse that he endeavors. (whether ἐνδημ or ἐκδημ) *to be well pleasing to the lord*. To do what is well pleasing to him shows that neither of these words can signify here his being with Christ in heaven. For when he is there the time of endeavoring to approve himself is over.

<sup>18</sup> St Paul from 4:12 to this place has, to convince them of his uprightness in his ministry, been showing that the hopes and sure expectation he had of eternal life kept him steady and resolute in an open sincere preaching of the gospel without any tricks or deceitful artifice. In which his argument stands thus 'Knowing that God who raised up 'Christ will raise me up again, I without any fear or consideration of what it may draw `upon me preach the gospel faithfully making this account that the momentaneous `afflictions which for it I may suffer here, which are but slight in comparison of the 'eternal things of an other life, 'will exceedingly increase my happiness in the other world, where I long to be. And therefore death which brings me home to Christ is no `terror to me, all my care is that whither I am to stay longer in this body, or quickly to leave `it, livening or dying I may approve my self to Christ in my ministry.' In the next two verses he has an other argument to fix in the Corinthians the same thoughts of him and that is the punishment he shall receive at the day of judgment if he should neglect to preach the gospel faithfully and not endeavor sincerely and earnestly to make converts to Christ.

9 Locke, , "The Preface: An Essay for the Understanding of St. Paul's Epistles by Consulting St. Paul Himself," in A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul (1707), ed. Wainwright, Arthur W. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 1:107, 111. 10 Dunn, John, The Political Thought of John Locke: An Historical Account of the Argument of the Two Treatises of Government (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 187. Dissertations on Theological Subjects Connected with the Study of St. Paul's Epistles Including an Essay on the Interpretation of Scripture. Essay on the Interpretation of Scripture. On Conversion and Changes of Character. Essay on Contrasts of Prophecy. As Oxford's regius professor of Greek, he gave lectures on both Paul's letters and Plato's dialogues. During visits to Continental Europe, Jowett met and studied the works of prominent German philosophers. He brought Hegelianism back to England with him, becoming one of Great Britain's most influential liberal theologians. The Epistles of St. Paul is regarded as one of the seminal works of liberal theology and biblical hermeneutics. Epistles, by Consulting St. Paul Himself. By purchasing books through this website, you support our non-profit organization. Ancient History Encyclopedia receives a small commission for each book sold through our affiliate partners. Start of this project gutenber ebook st. paul's epistles \*\*\*. Produced by KD Weeks, Colin Bell and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>. Transcriber's Note: The original text includes annotations on two Greek texts, the Epistle to the Colossians, and an Epistle to Philemon. On each page, several lines of Greek are accompanied by a double column of notations on key words. It was not possible to follow that convention in this version, given the nature of our medium. No attempt was made to link to the specific note. Please consult the note at the end of this text for any other issues that arose during its presentation. THE EPISTLES OF ST PAUL. III. The first roman captivity. To which is prefix'd, An essay for the understanding of St. Paul's epistles, by consulting St. Paul himself. The second edition. [Multiple Contributors, See Notes] on Amazon.com. \*FREE\* shipping on qualifying offers. A paraphrase and notes on the epistles of St. Paul To which is prefix'd, An essay for the understanding of St. Paul's epistles. For the 2020 holiday season, returnable items shipped between October 1 and December 31 can be returned until January 31, 2021. Read full return policy. A paraphrase and notes on has been added to your Cart.