difficulty. The buſineſs about which St Paul wrote was certainly well known to his correſpondents; but at this diſtance of time we can obtain no information concerning the occcaſion of his writing, of the character and circumſtances of thoſe perſons for whom his letters were intended, except what can be gleaned from the writings themſelves. It is no wonder, therefore, tho’ many alluſions ſhould be obſcure. Beſides, it is evi­dent from many paſſages that he anſwers letters and queſtions which his correſpondents had ſent him. If theſe had been preſerved, they would have thrown more light upon many things than all the notes and conjectures of the commentators.

The cauſes of obſcurity which have been now men­tioned are common to all the writers of the epiſtles; but there are ſome peculiar to St Paul. I. As he had an acute and fertile mind, he ſeems to have written with great rapidity, and without attending much to the common rules of method and arrangement. To this cauſe we may aſcribe his numerous and long parentheſes. In the heat of argument he ſometimes breaks off abruptly to follow out ſome new thought; and when he has exhauſted it, he returns from his digreſſion with­out informing his readers; ſo that it requires great at­tention to retain the connection. 2. His frequent change of perſon, too, creates ambiguity: by the pronoun *I* he ſometimes means himſelf; ſometimes any Chriſtian; ſometimes a Jew, and ſometimes any man. In uſing the pronoun we he ſometimes intends himſelf, ſome­times comprehends his companions, ſometimes the apoſtles; at one time he alludes to the converted Jews, at another time to the converted Gentiles. 3. There is a third cauſe of obſcurity; he frequently propoſes ob­jections, and anſwers them without giving any formal intimation. There are other difficulties, which ariſe from our uncertainty wſho are the perſons he is addreſſing, and what are the particular opinions and practices to which he refers. To theſe we may add two exter­nal cauſes, which have increaſed the difficulty of underſtanding the epiſtles. 1. The dividing them into chap­ters and verſes, which diſſolves the connection of the parts, and breaks them into fragments. If Cicero’s epiſtles had been ſo disjointed, the reading of them would be attended with leſs pleaſure and advantage, and with a great deal more labour. 2. We are accuſtomed to the phraſeology of the epiſtles from our in­fancy; but we have either no idea at all when we uſe it, or our idea of it is derived from the articles or ſyſtem which we have eſpouſed. But as different ſects have arbitrary definitions for St Paul’s phraſes, we ſhall ne­ver by following them diſcover the meaning of St Paul, who certainly did not adjuſt his phraſeology to any man’s ſyſtem.

The beſt plan of ſtudying the epiſtles is that which was propoſed and executed by Mr Locke. This we ſhall preſent to our readers in the words of that acute and judicious author.

“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 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 one of them today, and another tomorrow, &c. it is ten to one I ſhould ne­ver come to a full and clear comprehenſion of it. The way to underſtand the mind of him that writ 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 the proſecution of this thought, I concluded it neceſſary, for the underſtanding of any one of St Paul’s epiſtles, to read it all thro’ at one fitting, 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 reaſonings, that carried a thread of argument and conſiſtency all through them.”

Mr Locke tells us he continued to read the ſame epiſtle over and over again till he diſcovered the ſcope of the whole, and the different ſteps and arguments by which the writer accompliſhes his purpoſe. For he was convinced before reading his epiſtles, that Paul was a man of learning, of found ſenſe, and knew all the doc­trines of the goſpel by revelation. The ſpeeches record­ed in the Acts of the Apoſtles convinced this judicious critic that Paul was a cloſe and accurate reaſoner: and therefore he concluded that his epiſtles would not be written in a looſe, confuſed, incoherent ſtyle. Mr Locke accordingly followed the chain of the apoſtle’s diſcourſe, obſerved his inferences, and carefully examined from what premiſes they were drawn, till he obtained a general out­line of any particular epiſtle. If every divine would follow this method, he would ſoon acquire ſuch a know-