

# 1 CORINTHIANS

DAVID E. GARLAND



*Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*

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To John and Sarah



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## Series Preface

The chief concern of the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (BECNT) is to provide, within the framework of informed evangelical thought, commentaries that blend scholarly depth with readability, exegetical detail with sensitivity to the whole, and attention to critical problems with theological awareness. We hope thereby to attract the interest of a fairly wide audience, from the scholar who is looking for a thoughtful and independent examination of the text to the motivated lay Christian who craves a solid but accessible exposition.

Nevertheless, a major purpose is to address the needs of pastors and others involved in the preaching and exposition of the Scriptures as the uniquely inspired Word of God. This consideration affects directly the parameters of the series. For example, serious biblical expositors cannot afford to depend on a superficial treatment that avoids the difficult questions, but neither are they interested in encyclopedic commentaries that seek to cover every conceivable issue that may arise. Our aim, therefore, is to focus on those problems that have a direct bearing on the meaning of the text (although selected technical details are treated in the additional notes).

Similarly, a special effort is made to avoid treating exegetical questions for their own sake, that is, in relative isolation from the thrust of the argument as a whole. This effort may involve (at the discretion of the individual contributors) abandoning the verse-by-verse approach in favor of an exposition that focuses on the paragraph as the main unit of thought. In all cases, however, the commentaries will stress the development of the argument and explicitly relate each passage to what precedes and follows it so as to identify its function in context as clearly as possible.

We believe, moreover, that a responsible exegetical commentary must take fully into account the latest scholarly research, regardless of its source. The attempt to do this in the context of a conservative theological tradition presents certain challenges, and in the past the results have not always been commendable. In some cases, evangelicals appear to make use of critical scholarship not for the purpose of genuine interaction but only to dismiss it. In other cases, the interaction glides over into assimilation, theological distinctives are ignored or suppressed, and the end product cannot be differentiated from works that arise from a fundamentally different starting point.

The contributors to this series attempt to avoid these pitfalls. On the one hand, they do not consider traditional opinions to be sacrosanct, and they are certainly committed to do justice to the biblical text whether or not it supports such opinions. On the other hand, they will not quickly abandon a long-standing view, if there is persuasive evidence in its favor, for the sake of fashionable theories. What is more important, the contributors share a belief in the trustworthiness and essential unity of Scripture. They also consider that the historic formulations of Christian doctrine, such as the ecumenical creeds and many of the documents originating in the sixteenth-century Reformation, arose from a legitimate reading of Scripture, thus providing a proper framework for its further interpretation. No doubt, the use of such a starting point sometimes results in the imposition of a foreign construct on the text, but we deny that it must necessarily do so or that the writers who claim to approach the text without prejudices are invulnerable to the same danger.

Accordingly, we do not consider theological assumptions—from which, in any case, no commentator is free—to be obstacles to biblical interpretation. On the contrary, an exegete who hopes to understand the apostle Paul in a theological vacuum might just as easily try to interpret Aristotle without regard for the philosophical framework of his whole work or without having recourse to those subsequent philosophical categories that make possible a meaningful contextualization of his thought. It must be emphasized, however, that the contributors to the present series come from a variety of theological traditions and that they do not all have identical views with regard to the proper implementation of these general principles. In the end, all that really matters is whether the series succeeds in representing the original text accurately, clearly, and meaningfully to the contemporary reader.

Shading has been used to assist the reader in locating the introductory comments for each section. Textual variants in the Greek text are signaled in the author's translation by means of half-brackets around the relevant word or phrase (e.g., "Gerasenes"), thereby alerting the reader to turn to the additional notes at the end of each exegetical unit for a discussion of the textual problem. The documentation uses the author-date method, in which the basic reference consists of author's surname + year + page number(s): Fitzmyer 1981: 297. The only exceptions to this system are well-known reference works (e.g., *BDAG*, *LSJ*, *TDNT*). Full publication data and a complete set of indexes can be found at the end of the volume.

Robert Yarbrough  
Robert H. Stein

## Author's Preface

I am grateful to many people for helping this commentary come to fruition. It is an interesting exercise to come to 1 Corinthians after first writing on 2 Corinthians in another series, and I thank Moisés Silva for offering me this opportunity to contribute to the BECNT series. Jim Kinney and Wells Turner from Baker Academic have been very supportive and patient, and Robert Yarbrough proved to be a careful and constructive editor. I am thankful to those students who have read the manuscript in various stages: Anni Judkins, Andy Arterbury, Derek Dodson, Adam English, James Edward Ellis, Justin T. Pankow, and Kris Pratt. I owe the greatest gratitude to Scott Bertrand, who read the entire manuscript and made invaluable comments. Diana, my wife and partner in the gospel, has always been a tower of strength and a model of the love Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13. I am also in the debt of the many who have wrestled with this letter in various commentaries, monographs, and articles. They have become my teachers and debate partners. The contemporary relevance of this letter written to a Christian community situated in a city dominated by a worldview, aspirations, impulses, conventions, and symbolism that were antithetical to the cross of Christ was driven home to me in every section. Humanity has not changed its sinful ways since Paul wrote to the Corinthians, and only the gospel of the cross he proclaimed offers redemption.

David E. Garland



# Abbreviations

## Bibliographic and General

- ABD** *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by D. N. Freedman et al., 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
- BAGD** *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979)
- BDAG** *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)
- BDF** *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961)
- BGU** *Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, Griechische Urkunden*, 15 vols. (Berlin, 1895–1983)
- CIL** *Corpus inscriptionum latinarum*
- DBSup** *Dictionnaire de la Bible: Supplément*, edited by L. Pirot and A. Robert (Paris, 1928–)
- DPL** *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993)
- IG** *Inscriptiones graecae*, editio minor (Berlin, 1924–)
- IGR** *Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes*, edited by R. Cagnat et al. (Rome: L’Erma, 1964)
- JB** Jerusalem Bible
- KJV** King James Version
- LSJ** *A Greek-English Lexicon*, by H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H. S. Jones, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968)
- LXX** Septuagint
- MM** *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament: Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-literary Sources*, by J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan (reprinted Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976)
- MS(S)** manuscript(s)
- MT** Masoretic Text
- NA<sup>27</sup>** *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27th rev. ed., edited by [E. and E. Nestle,] B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, and B. M. Metzger (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993)
- NAB** New American Bible
- NASB** New American Standard Bible
- NEB** New English Bible
- NIDNTT** *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, edited by L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, and H. Bietenhard; English translation edited by C. Brown, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975–86)
- NIV** New International Version

NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
<i> OCD </i>	<i>Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> , edited by S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth, 3d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)
OT	Old Testament
<i> OTP </i>	<i>The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> , edited by J. H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983–85)
P. Oxy.	Papyrus Oxyrhynchus
<i> Rab. </i>	<i>Rabbah</i>
REB	Revised English Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SB	<i>Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch</i> , by H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, 6 vols. (Munich: Beck, 1922–61)
SEG	Supplementum epigraphicum graecum
<i> SIG </i>	<i>Sylloge inscriptionum graecarum</i> , edited by W. Dittenberger, 3d ed., 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1915–24)
<i> TDNT </i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich; translated and edited by G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76)
TEV	Today's English Version
<i> TLNT </i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the New Testament</i> , by C. Spicq; translated and edited by J. D. Ernest, 3 vols. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994)
UBS <sup>4</sup>	<i>The Greek New Testament</i> , 4th rev. ed., edited by B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, and B. M. Metzger (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1993)

## Hebrew Bible

Gen.	Genesis	2 Chron.	2 Chronicles	Dan.	Daniel
Exod.	Exodus	Ezra	Ezra	Hos.	Hosea
Lev.	Leviticus	Neh.	Nehemiah	Joel	Joel
Num.	Numbers	Esth.	Esther	Amos	Amos
Deut.	Deuteronomy	Job	Job	Obad.	Obadiah
Josh.	Joshua	Ps.	Psalms	Jon.	Jonah
Judg.	Judges	Prov.	Proverbs	Mic.	Micah
Ruth	Ruth	Eccles.	Ecclesiastes	Nah.	Nahum
1 Sam.	1 Samuel	Song	Song of Songs	Hab.	Habakkuk
2 Sam.	2 Samuel	Isa.	Isaiah	Zeph.	Zephaniah
1 Kings	1 Kings	Jer.	Jeremiah	Hag.	Haggai
2 Kings	2 Kings	Lam.	Lamentations	Zech.	Zechariah
1 Chron.	1 Chronicles	Ezek.	Ezekiel	Mal.	Malachi

## Greek Testament

Matt.	Matthew	Eph.	Ephesians	Heb.	Hebrews
Mark	Mark	Phil.	Philippians	James	James
Luke	Luke	Col.	Colossians	1 Pet.	1 Peter
John	John	1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians	2 Pet.	2 Peter
Acts	Acts	2 Thess.	2 Thessalonians	1 John	1 John
Rom.	Romans	1 Tim.	1 Timothy	2 John	2 John
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians	2 Tim.	2 Timothy	3 John	3 John
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians	Titus	Titus	Jude	Jude
Gal.	Galatians	Philem.	Philemon	Rev.	Revelation

## Other Jewish and Christian Writings

Adam and Eve	Books of Adam and Eve	Ign. <i>Eph.</i>	Ignatius, <i>Letter to the Ephesians</i>
Add. Esth.	Additions to Esther	Ign. <i>Magn.</i>	Ignatius, <i>Letter to the Magnesians</i>
<i>Apol.</i>	Tertullian, <i>Apologeticus</i> ( <i>Apolo-gy</i> )	Ign. <i>Pol.</i>	Ignatius, <i>Letter to Polycarp</i>
1–2 <i>Apol.</i>	Justin Martyr, <i>First and Second Apology</i>	Ign. <i>Rom.</i>	Ignatius, <i>Letter to the Romans</i>
As. Mos.	Assumption of Moses	Jdt.	Judith
Bar.	Baruch	Jos. As.	Joseph and Aseneth
2 Bar.	2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch	<i>Jov.</i>	Jerome, <i>Adversus Jovinianum libri II</i>
Barn.	Barnabas	Jub.	Jubilees
Bel	Bel and the Dragon	Let. Arist.	Letter of Aristaeas
<i>Bib. Ant.</i>	Pseudo-Philo, <i>Biblical Antiquities</i>	Let. Jer.	Letter of Jeremiah
<i>Cels.</i>	Origen, <i>Contra Celsum</i> ( <i>Against Celsus</i> )	1–4 Macc.	1–4 Maccabees
1–2 Clem.	1–2 Clement	<i>Marc.</i>	Tertullian, <i>Adversus Marcionem</i> ( <i>Against Marcion</i> )
<i>Dial.</i>	Justin Martyr, <i>Dialogus cum Trypho</i> ( <i>Dialogue with Trypho</i> )	Mart. Isa.	Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah
Did.	Didache	Mart. Pol.	Martyrdom of Polycarp
Diogn.	Diognetus	Odes Sol.	Odes of Solomon
1 Enoch	1 (Ethiopic) Enoch	Pol. <i>Phil.</i>	Polycarp, <i>Letter to the Philippians</i>
2 Enoch	2 (Slavonic) Enoch	Ps.-Phoc.	Pseudo-Phocylides
1 Esdr.	1 Esdras	Ps. Sol.	Psalms of Solomon
2 Esdr.	2 Esdras (4 Ezra)	Sib. Or.	Sibylline Oracles
Herm. <i>Man.</i>	Shepherd of Hermas, <i>Mandate(s)</i>	Sir.	Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
Herm. <i>Sim.</i>	Shepherd of Hermas, <i>Similitude(s)</i>	T. Abr.	Testament of Abraham
Herm. <i>Vis.</i>	Shepherd of Hermas, <i>Vision(s)</i>	T. Gad	Testament of Gad
<i>Hom. 1 Cor.</i>	John Chrysostom, <i>Homiliae in epistulam i ad Corinthios</i>	T. Isaac	Testament of Isaac
<i>Hom. Rom.</i>	John Chrysostom, <i>Homiliae in epistulam ad Romanos</i>	T. Iss.	Testament of Issachar
		T. Jacob	Testament of Jacob
		T. Job	Testament of Job
		T. Jos.	Testament of Joseph
		T. Levi	Testament of Levi
		T. Naph.	Testament of Naphtali

T. Reub.	Testament of Reuben	Tob.	Tobit
T. Sim.	Testament of Simeon	Wis.	Wisdom of Solomon
T. Sol.	Testament of Solomon		

## Josephus and Philo

<i>Abr.</i>	<i>On Abraham</i>	<i>Jos.</i>	<i>On Joseph</i>
<i>Ag. Ap.</i>	<i>Against Apion</i>	<i>J.W.</i>	<i>The Jewish War</i>
<i>Alleg. Interp.</i>	<i>Allegorical Interpretation</i>	<i>Life</i>	<i>The Life of Josephus</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i>	<i>Migr. Abr.</i>	<i>On the Migration of Abraham</i>
<i>Chang. Nam.</i>	<i>On the Change of Names</i>	<i>Mos.</i>	<i>On the Life of Moses</i>
<i>Cher.</i>	<i>On the Cherubim</i>	<i>Plant.</i>	<i>On Noah's Work as a Planter</i>
<i>Cont. Life</i>	<i>On the Contemplative Life</i>	<i>Post. Cain</i>	<i>On the Posterity and Exile of Cain</i>
<i>Creat.</i>	<i>On the Creation</i>	<i>Quest. Gen.</i>	<i>Questions and Answers on Genesis</i>
<i>Decal.</i>	<i>On the Decalogue</i>	<i>Rewards</i>	<i>On Rewards and Punishments/On Curses</i>
<i>Dreams</i>	<i>On Dreams</i>	<i>Sacr.</i>	<i>On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain</i>
<i>Drunk.</i>	<i>On Drunkenness</i>	<i>Sobr.</i>	<i>On Sobriety</i>
<i>Flight</i>	<i>On Flight and Finding</i>	<i>Spec. Laws</i>	<i>On the Special Laws</i>
<i>Gaius</i>	<i>On the Embassy to Gaius</i>	<i>Unchang.</i>	<i>On the Unchangeableness of God</i>
<i>Good Free</i>	<i>Every Good Person Is Free</i>	<i>Virt.</i>	<i>On the Virtues</i>
<i>Heir</i>	<i>Who Is the Heir of Divine Things?</i>	<i>Worse Att. Bet.</i>	<i>The Worse Attacks the Better</i>
<i>Husb.</i>	<i>On Husbandry</i>		
<i>Hypoth.</i>	<i>Hypothetica/Apology for the Jews</i>		

## Rabbinic Tractates

The abbreviations below are used for the names of tractates in the Babylonian Talmud (indicated by a prefixed *b.*), Palestinian Jerusalem Talmud (*y.*), Mishnah (*m.*), and Tosefta (*t.*).

‘Abod. Zar.	‘Abodah Zarah	<i>Ketub.</i>	<i>Ketubbot</i>
’Abot	’Abot	<i>Mak.</i>	<i>Makkot</i>
‘Arak.	‘Arakin	<i>Meg.</i>	<i>Megillah</i>
<i>B. Bat.</i>	<i>Baba Batra</i>	<i>Ned.</i>	<i>Nedarim</i>
<i>B. Meši’a</i>	<i>Baba Meši’a</i>	<i>Qidd.</i>	<i>Qiddušin</i>
<i>B. Qam.</i>	<i>Baba Qamma</i>	<i>Šabb.</i>	<i>Šabbat</i>
<i>Ber.</i>	<i>Berakot</i>	<i>Sanh.</i>	<i>Sanhedrin</i>
<i>Bik.</i>	<i>Bikkurim</i>	<i>Soṭah</i>	<i>Soṭah</i>
‘Erub.	‘Erubin	<i>Sukkah</i>	<i>Sukkah</i>
<i>Giṭ.</i>	<i>Giṭṭin</i>	<i>Yebam.</i>	<i>Yebamot</i>
<i>Ḥul.</i>	<i>Hullin</i>	<i>Yoma</i>	<i>Yoma</i>
<i>Ker.</i>	<i>Kerithot</i>	<i>Zebaḥ.</i>	<i>Zebaḥim</i>

## Qumran / Dead Sea Scrolls

1QH	Thanksgiving Hymns/Psalms ( <i>Hôdāyôt</i> )
1QM	War Scroll ( <i>Milḥāmâ</i> )
1QpHab	Commentary ( <i>Pesher</i> ) on Habakkuk
1QS	Manual of Discipline ( <i>Serek Hayyahad</i> , Rule/Order of the Community)
1QSa	Rule of the Congregation (1Q28a, appendix A to 1QS)
4Q416	Instruction <sup>b</sup> (formerly, Sap. Work A <sup>b</sup> )
CD	Damascus Document

## Classical Writers

<i>Descr.</i>	Pausanias, <i>Graeciae description</i> ( <i>Description of Greece</i> )
<i>Diatr.</i>	Epictetus, <i>Diatribai/Dissertationes</i>
<i>Eloc.</i>	Demetrius, <i>De elocutione</i> ( <i>Style</i> )
<i>Ep.</i>	various authors, <i>Epistulae</i> ( <i>Epistles</i> )
<i>Eth. nic.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Ethica nicomachea</i> ( <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> )
<i>Geogr.</i>	Strabo, <i>Geographica</i> ( <i>Geography</i> )
<i>Inst.</i>	Quintilian, <i>Institutio oratoria</i>
<i>Leuc. Clit.</i>	Achilles Tattius, <i>Leucippe et Clitophon</i> ( <i>The Adventures of Leucippe and Cleitophon</i> )
<i>Lives</i>	Diogenes Laertius, <i>Lives of Eminent Philosophers</i>
<i>Mem.</i>	Xenophon, <i>Memorabilia</i>
<i>Metam.</i>	Apuleius, <i>Metamorphoses</i> ( <i>The Golden Ass</i> )
<i>Mor.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Moralia</i>
<i>Or.</i>	various authors, <i>Orationes</i> ( <i>Discourses</i> )
<i>Rhet.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Rhetorica</i> ( <i>Rhetoric</i> )
<i>Sat.</i>	various authors, <i>Satirae</i> ( <i>Satires</i> )
<i>Satyr.</i>	Petronius, <i>Satyricon</i>

# Greek Transliteration

α	a	ζ	z	λ	l	π	p	φ	ph
β	b	η	ē	μ	m	ρ	r	χ	ch
γ	g (n)	θ	th	ν	n	σ	ς	ψ	ps
δ	d	ι	i	ξ	x	τ	t	ω	ō
ε	e	κ	k	ο	o	υ	y (u)	’	h

## Notes on the transliteration of Greek

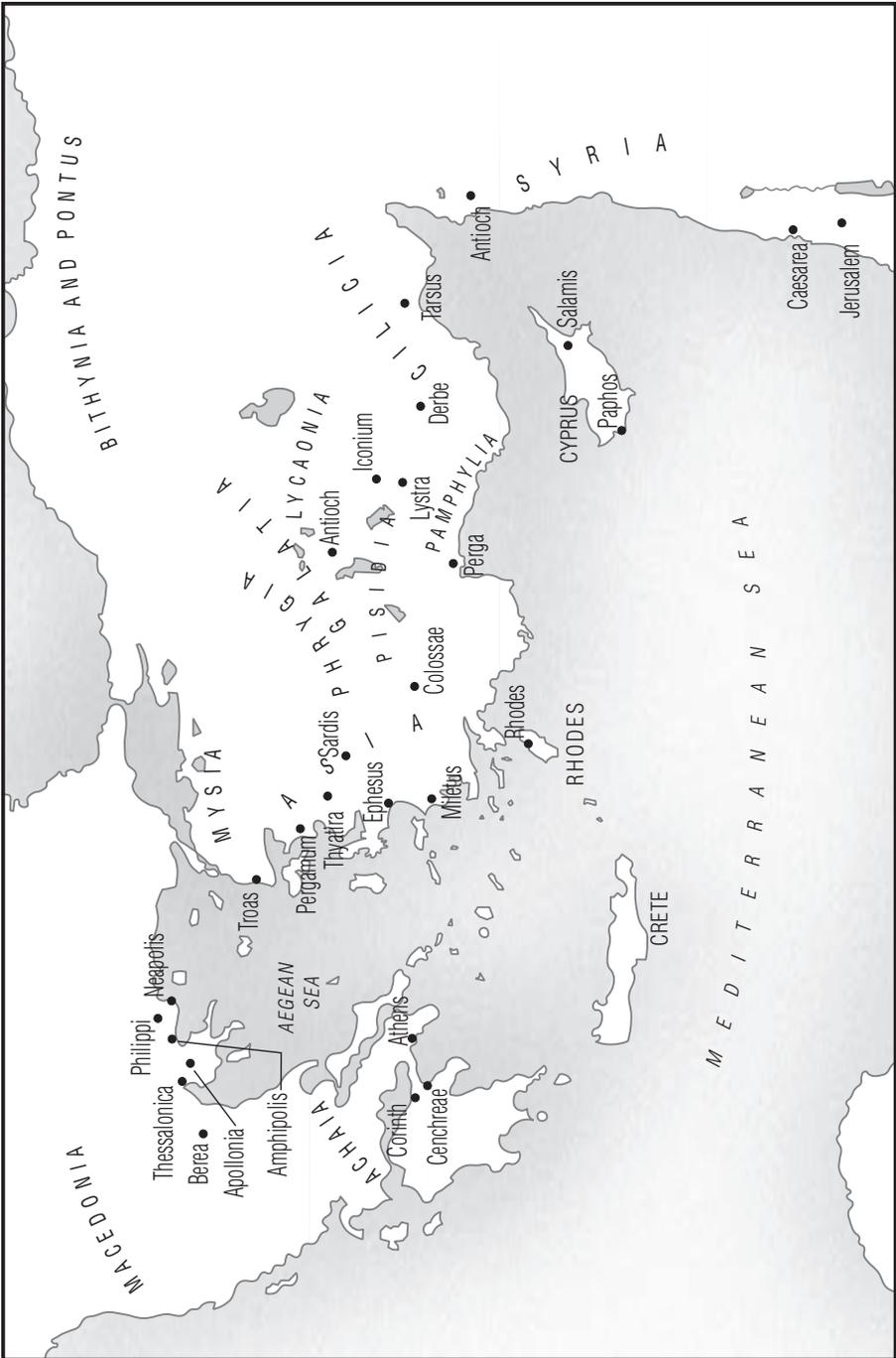
1. Accents, lenis (smooth breathing), and *iota* subscript are not shown in transliteration.
2. The transliteration of asper (rough breathing) precedes a vowel or diphthong (e.g., *ἀ* = *ha*; *αἶ* = *hai*) and follows ρ (i.e., *ῥ* = *rh*).
3. *Gamma* is transliterated *n* only when it precedes γ, κ, ξ, or χ.
4. *Upsilon* is transliterated *u* only when it is part of a diphthong (e.g., αυ, ευ, ου, υι).

# Hebrew Transliteration

א	ʾ	אֲ	ā	qāmeṣ
ב	b	בֶּ	a	pataḥ
ג	g	גֶּ	a	furtive pataḥ
ד	d	דֶּ	e	səgôl
ה	h	הֶ	ē	šērê
ו	w	וֶ	i	short ḥîreq
ז	z	זֶ	ī	long ḥîreq written defectively
ח	ḥ	חֶ	o	qāmeṣ ḥāṭûp
ט	ṭ	טוֹ	ô	ḥôlem written fully
י	y	יוֹ	ō	ḥôlem written defectively
כ	k	כּוֹ	û	šûreq
ל	l	לוֹ	u	short qibbûṣ
מ	m	מוֹ	ū	long qibbûṣ written defectively
נ	n	נְהֹ	â	final qāmeṣ hēʾ (הֹ = âh)
ס	s	סֵי	ê	səgôl yôd (*כֵּ = êy)
ע	ʿ	עֵי	ê	šērê yôd (*כֵּ = êy)
פ	p	פֵי	î	ḥîreq yôd (*כֵּ = îy)
צ	ṣ	צֶ	ă	ḥāṭēp pataḥ
ק	q	קֶ	ě	ḥāṭēp səgôl
ר	r	רֹ	ô	ḥāṭēp qāmeṣ
שׁ	ś	שׁוֹ	ě	vocal šewāʾ
שׂ	š	שׂוֹ	–	silent šewāʾ
ת	t			

## Notes on the transliteration of Hebrew

1. Accents are not shown in transliteration.
2. Silent šewāʾ is not indicated in transliteration.
3. The unaspirated forms of א ב ג ד ה ו פ כ ל נ are not specially indicated in transliteration.
4. *Dāgeš forte* is indicated by doubling the consonant. *Dāgeš* present for euphonious reasons is not indicated in transliteration.
5. *Maqqēp* is represented by a hyphen.



# Introduction to 1 Corinthians

## Roman Corinth

The city of Corinth was ideally situated on the narrow land bridge between Peloponnesus and mainland Greece. Strabo (*Geogr.* 8.6.20) attributes the city's wealth to the fortune of being "the master of two harbors." Cenchreae, about six miles to the east on the Saronic Gulf, led straight to Asia, and Lechaenum, about two miles to the north on the Corinthian Gulf, led straight to Italy. A four-mile rock-cut track (*diolkos*, built ca. 625–585 B.C.) connected the two ports, enabling cargo and even small ships to be hauled across the isthmus to the other gulf, and thus allowed transporters to avoid the treacherous sea journey around the cape of the Peloponnese (cf. Acts 27). Corinth was a natural crossroad for land and sea travel.

Corinth had aroused Rome's wrath as the chief city of the Achaean league, which revolted rather than submit to Rome's demands to dissolve the league (cf. Cicero, *De lege agraria* 1.5; Strabo, *Geogr.* 8.4.8; 8.6.23; Pausanias, *Descr.* 2.1.2). The Roman military machine's superior numbers and prowess led to the league's inevitable defeat and the demolition of its leading city in 146 B.C. Lucius Mummius, the Roman general, sacked and burned the city. Reportedly, the male population was killed, the women and children were sold into slavery (Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes* 3.53–54; Strabo, *Geogr.* 8.6.23; 10.5.4; Pausanias, *Descr.* 2.1.2), and the city's treasures were plundered. The extent of the destruction of the city may have been exaggerated by the ancient sources (Wiseman 1979: 494), but 146 B.C. marks its end as a normally functioning city.

Strabo (*Geogr.* 8.6.23) asserts that the town remained desolated and largely uninhabited for 102 years after this defeat. Its old shrines became a curiosity for tourists, and the ruins provided shelter to squatters and visitors to the Isthmian games now under the control of Sicyon (C. Williams 1987: 26; Stansbury 1990: 134).<sup>1</sup> In 44 B.C., shortly before his assassination, Julius Caesar decided to establish a Roman colony on the site with the official name *Colonia Laus Iulia Corinthiensis* (Colony of Corinth in Honor of Julius).<sup>2</sup> Rome established colonies to solve over-

1. For a general discussion of the history of Corinth during this time period, see Wiseman (1979).

2. Gebhard (1993) presents evidence that the pan-Hellenic Isthmian festival returned to Corinth's control almost immediately after the colony was founded. The emperor Nero visited Corinth in A.D. 66 and participated in the games (and, not surprisingly, won).

crowding in the city and to promulgate Roman civilization across the world. This resettlement created a new Roman heritage for Corinth and gave it a different appearance from its Greek period. The new city was laid out with a new grid on top of the former Greek city (see Romano 1993). Many of the existing Greek buildings were utilized in the design, but the Romans imposed a city plan, architecture, political organization, and ethos different from the Greek predecessor.<sup>3</sup>

Strabo (*Geogr.* 8.6.23; 17.3.15) recounts that Julius Caesar colonized the city with persons predominately belonging to the “freedman class.” Rome needed to export the swelling ranks of the poor and settle its potentially restless army veterans. The city’s Roman identity was guaranteed by the immigration of a Roman population. Hopkins (1978: 66) estimates that during the years 88–80 B.C., “Roughly half of the free adult males in Italy left their farms and went to Italian towns or were settled by the state on new farms in Italy or the provinces.” A portion of these must have resettled in Corinth. Crinagoras (*Greek Anthology* 9.284) acridly refers to the Corinthian settlers as “those often sold, unstable or disreputable slaves.” Appian alleges that the first colonists were desperate and out of options, and Strabo’s (*Geogr.* 8.6.23) claim that they looted the Greek tombs and established a market for necrocorinthian ware suggests that these first colonists were strapped for cash (Lanci 1997: 26–27). The city, however, was soon transformed from ruin to riches. The denizens of Corinth in Paul’s day were known for their wealth and ostentation. The new city allowed many aggressive freedmen and their heirs, who would have been freeborn, the chance to acquire wealth through commercial ventures. Without an entrenched aristocracy, the citizens of Corinth were not fated “to remain in their allotted position on the social scale” but had a real opportunity for upward social mobility, primarily by attaining wealth and buying friendships and clients (Carter 1997: 53). The favorable economic climate attracted settlers from all over the empire who could work their way up the social ladder. Stansbury (1990: 120–21) makes it clear, however, that this society was not egalitarian. It was an oligarchy that was “hierarchic and elitist, and therefore safe” from a Roman point of view. De Vos (1999: 189) notes that the elite “used a number of social control mechanisms to restrict access to their group, including wealth, marriage, and social ties.” Despite the city’s prosperity, poverty afflicted many inhabitants. Alciphron (*Epistles* 3.60), a second-century writer, explained why he did not go to Corinth: “I learned in a short time the nauseating behavior of the rich

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3. Willis (1991) argues that the character of Corinth continued to be Hellenistic and that its Roman character should not be overemphasized at the expense of its Greek past. Gill (1993) disputes his conclusions and contends that scholarship should continue to read the correspondence against the background of a Roman city (cf. also De Vos 1999: 182–83; Winter 2001: 7–25).

and the misery of the poor.” Murphy-O’Connor (1984: 148) interprets the proverb “Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth” (Strabo, *Geogr.* 8.6.20; Horace, *Ep.* 1.17.36) to mean that only “the tough survived there.” Winter (1989) points to evidence of grain shortages after Paul left Corinth that resulted in famines worsening the divide between rich and poor.

In Paul’s time, Corinth had a mixed ethnic population of Roman freedmen, indigenous Greeks, and immigrants from far and wide. De Vos (1999: 187–88) argues that it is conceivable that Jews were included among the original colonists and that a strong Jewish community was “well integrated and on good terms with the wider community.” Despite this diversity, Corinth was heavily influenced by Rome, and C. Williams (1987: 31) argues that its population “felt themselves to be Roman.” Pausanius’s claim that the city was basically Greek has been reevaluated. Winter (2001: 16) remarks, “While Pausanius provides important information on the topography and religious sites of Corinth from a later era, his rereading of Corinth from the fashionable perspective of the Greek Classical revival in the Rome of his day does not provide hard background evidence of the culture of the mid-first century.” Stansbury (1990: 116) concludes, “The Greek Corinth of old would live on in folk memory and literature, reinforced by the traditions of the Isthmian festival.” But everything was given a Roman stamp. When Paul visited, the city was geographically in Greece but culturally in Rome.

In what follows, I highlight two factors from this urban context—social relations and religious/philosophical influences—that I believe have a direct bearing on the Corinthians’ behavior and their misinterpretation of the Christian faith that Paul is compelled to address.

## Social Relations

This letter should be read against the background of Corinth as a city imbued with Roman cultural values (Gill 1993: 328). Aulus Gellius (*Noctes atticae* [*Attic Nights*] 16.13.9) claimed that colonies were “miniatures” of Rome. They were established to foster the majesty of Roman culture, religion, and values. The original freedmen settlers were still under obligation to their former masters in Italy, and they may have acted as their business agents (De Vos 1999: 190). The official language of Latin predominates in the extant public inscriptions prior to the time of Hadrian (101 of 104 [Kent 1966: 19]), and the inscriptions on the coinage minted by the magistrates were in Latin.<sup>4</sup> The religious focal point of the Corinthian forum was the temple at the west end dedicated

4. Eight of the seventeen names associated with Corinth in the NT are Latin: Fortunatus (1 Cor. 16:17), Lucius (Rom. 16:21), Tertius (Rom. 16:22), Gaius and Quartus (Rom. 16:23), Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2), and Titius Justus (Acts 18:7).

to the imperial family (designated Temple E). It was of Roman construction and towered over all other temples as an ever present symbol of the dominant imperial presence.<sup>5</sup> Upon entering the forum, one could not help but direct an eye to this temple, and the construction of the long line of buildings blocked the view of the grand archaic temple to the north.

When Paul came to Corinth to begin his missionary activity, the city teemed with commerce as the vital link between Rome and its eastern provinces, attracting traders from everywhere in the empire (C. Williams 1993). Throngs attended the Isthmian games. A building boom occurred between the reigns of Augustus and Nero, making Corinth “arguably the most dazzling and modern of Greek cities” (Savage 1996: 36). Many inhabitants were so affluent that “wealth and ostentatious display became the hallmark of Corinth” (Betz 1985: 53), which contrasted with the relative poverty of the surrounding countryside of Achaia. Betz (1985: 53) attests that while “Greeks tried as best they could to preserve their traditional culture, the Corinthians indulged new attitudes and ways of life fueled by the new wealth and unbridled by ancestral tradition. Thus, the province and its capital were in many respects worlds apart.” Corinth rose in status as a Roman colony while the surrounding areas tied to the Greek past decreased in status. Spawforth (1994: 407) calls attention to grievances raised against Corinth by people of Argos who grumbled that the Corinthians were proud of their privileged position with Rome and had turned their backs on their Greek heritage and the other cities in the old Achaean league (see Winter 2001: 4–5, 19–20).

This letter also should be read against the background of a mercantile society, as “the core community and core tradition of the city culture were those of trade, business, entrepreneurial pragmatism in the pursuit of success” (Thiselton 2000: 4). These values fed the zeal to attain public status, to promote one’s own honor, and to secure power. According to Savage (1996: 35), “Perhaps no city in the Empire offered so congenial an atmosphere for individual and corporate advancement.” B. Peterson (1998: 61) asserts that Corinth “seems to have been a city designed for those who were preoccupied with the marks of social status”—that is, “the value which others place on one’s goods and achievements” (Barclay 1992: 56). Horace’s (*Sat.* 1.6.16–17) mockery of the Roman populace as “absurd slaves to fame, who are stupefied by titles and masks” could apply to Corinth. Meeks (1983: 54) argues that an individual’s status was tied to a variety of factors: “occupational prestige, income or wealth, education and knowledge, religious purity, family and ethnic group position, and local-community sta-

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5. It is probably the Temple of Octavia, which Pausanias (*Descr.* 2.3.1) mentions as above the marketplace (cf. C. Williams 1989).

tus.” They do not all carry the same weight, and their relative value in the equation depends on who is doing the weighing. Meeks (1983: 54) explains, “Most individuals tend to measure themselves by the standards of some group that is very important to them—their reference group, whether or not they belong to it—rather than by the standards of the whole society.” One could possess high status according to certain markers but low status when it came to others, creating a status dissonance that fed an internal restlessness and a greater desire to achieve the *dignitas* that one believed was one’s due. Stansbury (1990: 278) contends that a “shortage of reasonable avenues of honor at the top of the political structure” existed. The scramble for scarce honor was as intense as the scramble for scarce wealth. The result was that many well-to-do sought honor wherever they could get it. Stansbury (1990: 278) lists the available options as “sponsoring private entertainment, games and festivals, patronage of new cults or *collegia*, demonstration of rhetorical skill or philosophical acumen, sponsorship or receipt of an approved honorary statue with appropriate epigraph, and socially conspicuous displays of a private retinue of slaves and freedmen.” In this social climate, one could only increase one’s standing via a “combination of patronage, marriage, wealth, and patient cultivation of connections” (Stansbury 1990: 87; cf. Chow 1992). MacMullen (1974: 106–7) argues that a key measure of one’s standing in Roman societal structure was the size of philanthropic gifts and the number of clients. Crucial for any success and status in this culture was attaining the patronage of powerful persons and bestowing benefaction on others to establish an array of influential friends and clients, exerting political enmity to ostracize opponents, and employing skillful oratory to persuade others in any assembly. To use terms from American culture: schmoozing, massaging a superior’s ego, rubbing shoulders with the powerful, pulling strings, scratching each other’s back, and dragging rivals’ names through the mud—all describe what was required to attain success in this society. Persons also wanted to accumulate wealth and “then display or distribute it in a way that would bring individual honor” (Stansbury 1990: 76). Possessing wealth cleared a path for social climbing because it enabled one to buy friends and clients through extravagant spending and win the esteem accorded benefactors.

The implications of this backdrop for understanding the problems that beset the Corinthian church should not be underestimated. Few Christians could have been unaffected by the dominant culture surrounding them, even if they assimilated its values only subliminally. Most, if not all, of the problems that Paul addresses were hatched from the influence of this setting. Values that were antithetical to the message of the cross—particularly those related to honor and status so basic to the Greco-Roman social system, in which power manifesting itself in ruthlessness and self-advancement is thought to be the only sensible course—percolated into the church, destroying its fellowship and its Christian witness as some members sought

to balance civic norms with Christian norms. Secular wisdom—which reflected the code of conduct of the social elites, who jostled one another for power, prestige, and popularity—had its hold on members of the church. Its values played havoc on Paul’s attempt to build a community based on love, selflessness, and the equal worth of every member. Corinthian society was riddled by competitive individualism, and this ethos spilled over into the relationships in the church as wealthier members competed for followers. Socially pretentious and self-important individuals appear to have dominated the church. It is likely that they flaunted their symbols of status, wisdom, influence, and family pedigree and looked down on others of lesser status. They appear to have wanted to preserve the social barriers of class and status that permeated their social world but were nullified in the cross of Christ. For some, the Christian community had become simply another arena to compete for status according to the societal norms.

Drawing on Mary Douglas’s anthropological studies and grid and group matrix, Carter (1997: 51) thinks that this church’s culture fits the model of a “highly egocentric, individualistic and competitive society, dominated by the ‘Big Man,’ who imposes himself as a leader, and who derives prestige and power from the size of his following.” He goes on to describe this culture as “highly materialistic and egocentric: any sense of relationship or mutual obligation rests purely on a fiscal basis: where there is no interchange of goods or services there is only suspicion, hostility and the risk of warfare.” Although this sociological model may not fit the Corinthian church precisely, it does help to make sense of internal power struggles that were tearing the church apart. The recent trend is to trace the problem in Corinth back to “personality centred politics” (Clarke 1993: 93; see also M. Mitchell 1993: 67; Welborn 1997). The discordant factions within the community did not revolve around fine points of theological interpretation but developed between rival leading figures who may have been the hosts of different house churches. Paul does not address specifically the theology of the factions but condemns the fact that Corinthians were aligning themselves along party lines and around specific persons, who apparently developed and encouraged personality cults. These unnamed individuals in the church were likely to be wealthier and influential and were unduly influenced by worldly wisdom.<sup>6</sup> Those who provided homes for worship are most likely the culprits. They could exert more influence in their home than

6. Some in the church apparently enjoyed the privileges of the well-off (see Judge 1960; Theissen 1987: 69–110; 2001; Meeks 1983: 51–73; D. Martin 2001). They had property and the means to travel. The named persons associated with Corinth who fit this description are Crispus (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:14), Titius Justus (Acts 18:7), Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16; 16:15–17), Erastus (Rom. 16:23), Gaius (1 Cor. 1:14; Rom. 16:23), and possibly Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11), if she was a Christian and resided in Corinth and not Ephesus (cf. Phoebe [Rom. 16:1–2]).

in a neutral meeting place. Because they ranked higher socially and because the group met on their turf, they could control worship practices, the distribution of honors, organization patterns, and even doctrine, and they would be looked upon by others as examples to follow.

The “spirit of the world” (2:12) is synonymous with the “wisdom of the world” (1:20; 3:19; cf. “wisdom of this age,” 2:6), and Pickett (1997: 63) contends, “The latter phrase demystifies the former in that it shows that to be under the influence of the ‘spirit of the world’ is to be guided by the values which constitute its wisdom.” It makes clear that the conflict pits God and God’s ways, exhibited in the weakness of the cross, against the world and its ways, exhibited by its fascination with displays of status and power. Pickett (1997: 64) continues, “Thus the world which stands in opposition to God is a real social world, and the ‘spirit of the world’ refers, in some sense at least, to the values which govern the attitudes, judgments and behaviour of the people in that world.” It is the baneful influence of this secular wisdom on members in the church rather than some overarching theological misconception that lies behind most of the problems that Paul addresses in the letter (cf. Winter 2001 for a similar approach). It, not some imagined theological dispute swirling around Peter, Apollos, Paul, or the elusive Christ party, sparked off the rivalries ripping apart the fellowship. It is behind the Corinthians’ attraction to flashy displays of knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual gifts. It throws light on why someone pursued a lawsuit against a brother Christian (6:1–11), why some sought to justify eating food sacrificed to idols so that they could participate fully in their society (8:1–11:1), why the issue of headdress during worship became a problem (11:2–16), and why some wished to vaunt their spiritual gifts above others (12:1–14:40). Paul pictures the church as divided into “haves” and “have-nots” (11:22). Since one needed to affirm one’s wealth and social status to confirm one’s identity in this culture, the “haves” show no qualms about humiliating the “have-nots” at the Lord’s Supper, widening the division in the camp (11:17–34). The cultural values may shed light on aspects of the man living with his father’s wife and the church’s incriminating silence (5:1–8).

Barclay (1992) offers an important entrée into understanding the social roots of the problems in Corinth by noting a stark contrast between the issues Paul addresses in 1 Thessalonians and those in 1 Corinthians. Though the two churches were founded within months of each other, “these sibling communities developed remarkably different interpretations of the Christian faith” (Barclay 1992: 50). Barclay isolates one neglected factor that may explain this phenomenon: the social relations with outsiders. One discerns in 1 Thessalonians evidence of painful conflict with outsiders (1 Thess. 1:6; 2:2, 14–16; 3:3) and a sense of alienation from society and hostility toward it (1 Thess. 4:5, 13; 5:7). By con-

trast, no reference to the Corinthian church's experience of social alienation appears in 1 or 2 Corinthians (Barclay 1992: 57). Instead, Paul contrasts the affliction and dishonor of apostles with the Corinthians' relative tranquility (1 Cor. 4:9–13; 15:30–32; 16:9). The Corinthians appear to be getting on quite well in their community (De Vos 1999: 206–14). Paul can envision certain ones participating in feasts in the dining rooms of pagan temples (8:10) and being invited to share meals in the homes of unbelievers (10:27). Unbelievers drop into worship gatherings (14:24–25). Some members of the church make use of the civil court system to bring suit against other believers (6:1–8). Apparently, they have no religious scruples about being well integrated into a pagan society that is inherently hostile to the wisdom of the cross. In Corinth, no countercultural impact, so central to the preaching of the cross (1:18–25), is evident. Their faith appears not to have created any significant social and moral realignment of their lives. They face little or no social ostracism, and the lack of external pressure contributes to their internal dissension.

Paul thinks that it is fine to have contact with unbelievers to witness to the gospel (9:19–23; 10:32–33), but he views the world with “dark apocalyptic spectacles” (Barclay 1992: 60) and declares that “bad company ruins good morals” (15:33). His insistence throughout the letter that the church is set apart (cf. 1:2) from a world doomed to be destroyed would not have been necessary in Thessalonica, according to Barclay (1992: 59). Barclay's (1992: 71) conclusion about the Corinthians' attitude toward their faith and the nature of the church unveils the root of Paul's grievances against them:

The church is not a cohesive community but a club, whose meetings provide important moments of spiritual insight and exaltation, but do not have global implications of moral and social change. The Corinthians could gladly participate in this church as one segment of their lives. But the segment, however important, is not the whole and the centre. Their perception of their church and of the significance of their faith could correlate well with a lifestyle which remained fully integrated in Corinthian society.

In this letter, Paul addresses the issue of the church's identity over against its cultural surroundings and seeks to stake out firm boundaries. The problem was not that the church was in Corinth but that too much of Corinth was in the church (Fee 1987: 4). He seeks to disarm the warring factions, to bolster the sense of their common union in Christ, and to widen the boundaries between the church and its surrounding culture. Paul seeks to reform their values so that they live in a manner congruent with the cross and to make them aware that only God's measure of judgment at the end of the ages has any consequence.

He shows how he has abandoned his concern for status because the message of the cross he preaches makes it contemptible in the eyes of God. In fact, God has already made that judgment known in the cross and resurrection of Christ, with the result that the world can be divided up into those who are being saved and those who are perishing (1:18; 2 Cor. 2:15).

## Religious Influences

As a cosmopolitan city, Corinth was a religious melting pot with older and newer religions flourishing side by side. De Vos (1999: 192) identifies the gods and cults celebrated by the Corinthians as “Apollo, Aphrodite/Venus, Asclepius, Athena, Athena Chalinitus, Demeter and Kore, Dionysus, Ephesian Artemis, Hera Acraea, Hermes/Mercury, Jupiter Capitolinus, Poseidon/Neptune, Tyche, Fortuna, and Zeus.” Egyptian mystery cults, such as the worship of Isis, also were practiced.<sup>7</sup> Never to be forgotten was the ubiquitous attraction of magic. The imperial cult, an “alliance of throne and altar” forged by Augustus, was virulent and expansive during this time and was extremely influential in a Roman colony. Broneer (1971: 170) asserts, “Scholars’ penchant for orderly exposition and clear definition can be misleading for an understanding of the religious life of a given period because they pretend to make clear what was anything but clear to the ancients.” Most persons could accommodate all gods and goddesses into their religious behavior, and they could choose from a great cafeteria line of religious practices. Many believed that there was safety in numbers: the more gods that one appeased and had on one’s side, the better. The temple of Demeter in Pergamum, for example, also had altars to the gods Hermes, Helios, Zeus, Asclepius, and Heracles. Angus (1925: 192) cites the private chapel of the emperor Alexander Severus (third century) as containing shrines to Orpheus, Abraham, Apollonius of Tyana, and Jesus. In one papyrus fragment the writer says, “I pray to all gods” (P. Oxy. 1766 [18]), and an inscription announces, “We magnify every God” (SIG 1153). Some welcomed the religious stimulus that strange new gods provided (cf. Acts 17:18–21), since they offered new ways of experimenting with religion and worship. Roman officials did not police private associations and became upset with religious behavior only when it was perceived as disturbing the peace and security they so zealously guarded. The Roman senate did take action against groups suspected of gross immorality, subverting good order, and drawing people away from expected civic loyalty.

7. Apuleius (*Metam.* 11) gives a full description of his initiation into the Isis cult in Corinth.

Paul's opening comments in Rom. 1:18–32 may provide us with impressions that match Corinth's religious and ethical milieu. The plethora of idols in the city illustrated his point that humans had exchanged the true God for false gods and honored the creature rather than the Creator, and that the human mind was a perpetual factory of idols. They did not see fit to have God in their knowledge, so God gave them up to their unfit minds (Rom. 1:28). The unfit mind is so corrupted that it no longer can think straight and becomes a totally untrustworthy guide in moral decisions. The city's rampant immorality was living proof of this principle. The breakdown of morals leads to the breakup of society, as cataloged in Rom. 1:29–32. It results in a religion based on falsehoods, a body that is defiled, and a society in which hate and war are at home. The inevitable price of having one's way with God is spiritual poverty and in the end moral abasement.

Paul's statements in Rom. 1:18–32 imply that Christians and Jews were different from the dominant pagan culture because of their religious intolerance of other gods and their rigorous standards regarding sexual conduct. As a result of the former, they were labeled "atheists" because they did not believe in the traditional gods—only their one God. Apuleius (*Metam.* 9.14) describes a certain baker's wife in his novel as "an enemy of faith and chastity" because she is a "despiser of all the gods whom others did honor." Christians were labeled "misanthropes," haters of humankind, because they refused to join in the worship and sacrificial meals offered to local, traditional gods and in their great festivals that quickened local pride or to help polish a city's image as loyal to the emperor by taking part in the imperial cult. Their detachment rankled their neighbors as an impious disparagement of sources of civic vanity. Since the gods were also deemed to be the ones who preserved the state and social order, to reject them opened up the city to divine disfavor and catastrophe. Christians may also have been deemed strange because they themselves had no temples or national temple. They met in private homes (or rented assembly halls) at night, greeted each other with a holy kiss, and partook of the body and blood of one who was crucified by Roman authorities in a provincial backwater. Christians also had no particular national identity and consequently had no established political ties with the Romans. Any repudiation of the imperial cult would have made them particularly vulnerable and politically suspect.

The most important religious influence in Corinth at this time was the imperial cult, which worshiped political power as divine. The emperor cult pervaded public space. Wink (1992: 300) observes that empires "cannot exist for a moment without the spiritual undergirding of a persuasive ideology." Stansbury (1990: 260) notes, "Religious ceremony and political authority were inseparable." The Romans in the first century did not worship the seated emperor but only his "genius,"

which, as Wink (1992: 300) contends, is “his inspiration, the daemon or god or spirituality that animated the incumbent ruler by virtue of his being incumbent. His ‘genius’ is the totality of impersonal power located in an office of surpassing might.” Winter (2001: 270–71) comments, “The imperial cult grew more spectacularly throughout the empire during the Julio-Claudian and Flavian period than the early Christian movement ever did, and the establishment of a federal cult in Corinth was a matter of great political, social, and financial importance for the colony.” The cult was the incarnation of Roman ideology on Greek soil and tended to raise the prestige of the city. In addition to the quadrennial and the biennial Isthmian games, which became connected to the imperial cult, the federal imperial cult celebrated the reigning emperor’s birthday every year. It required an overt display of reverence for the imperial house and the performing of sacrifices and conducting of festivals and feasts (see *IGR* 4:1068c [cited by Winter 2001: 275]). Winter notes evidence that householders sacrificed on altars outside their homes as the cult procession passed by (citing Price 1984: 112).

Paul’s proclamation that Jesus alone is Lord (8:5–6) directly challenged the imperial cult. “Lord Jesus” was a different kind of “emperor,” “savior,” and “son of God” than Caesar. The problem for some was that this Lord offered no actual political favors in this worldly realm. S. Mitchell’s (1993: 10 [cited by Winter 1995: 176]) reflections about the imperial cult in Anatolia are applicable to Corinth:

One cannot avoid the impression that the obstacle which stood in the way of the progress of Christianity, and the force which would have drawn new adherents back to conformity with the prevailing paganism, was the public worship of the emperors. . . . It was not a change of heart that might win a Christian convert back to paganism, but the overwhelming pressure to conform imposed by the institutions of his city and the activities of his neighbours.

At a later time and in a different place, Pliny the Younger (*Ep.* 96) used the imperial cult to determine whether persons were Christians or not: if they were willing to deny their Lord and sacrifice incense to a statue of a living emperor, they were not Christians.

This raises the question of how someone like Erastus, whom Paul identifies in Rom. 16:23 as the city’s οἰκονόμος (*oikonomos*, which may be equivalent to “aedile”), coped with the pagan trappings of his office (Stansbury 1990: 323). Most assume that he was the same Erastus who paid for paving the plaza adjoining the theater to fulfill an election pledge and publicized this benefaction with an inscription. With the abbreviations spelled out in brackets, it reads: [—] *Erastus pro aedilit[at]e s[ua] p[ecunia] stravit*. Kent (1966: no. 232) translates it: [—] “Erastus in return for his aedileship laid [the pavement] at his own

expense.” The cognomen is unusual and does not occur elsewhere in Corinthian evidence. Its rarity does not demand that these two mentions of Erastus point to one and the same person, but its rarity in Corinth strengthens the likelihood that they are (see Gill 1989; Clarke 1993: 46–56). Since the inscription fits the general time frame of Paul’s letters, it is unlikely that two different persons with this uncommon name held office in Corinth.<sup>8</sup> Bartchy (*ABD* 6:67) thinks it highly probable that Erastus “had to sell himself to the city (as a form of bonding) in order to secure this responsible position” (cf. Cadbury 1931; Theissen 1982: 75–83; Fox 1986: 293; D. Martin 1990: 15–16, 174–76). But Kent (1966: no. 232) interprets the lack of a patronymic in the inscription as suggesting that he was a freedman “who had acquired considerable wealth in commercial activities.” Since it is unusual for Paul to mention someone’s office, Erastus must have had a reasonably high standing (De Vos 1999: 200 n. 83). Stansbury (1990: 332), however, argues that aedile was an annual office, and it would only be by chance that Paul wrote to the Romans the year that Erastus held that office. Paul probably used *oikonomos* “in a generic sense of one with responsibilities in the running of the city, that is, a decurion.” Stansbury (1990: 383) surmises,

Possibly Paul uses the term in a general sense that would be understood of a class of local offices below those held by the top four magistrates. More likely he meant a specific minor office, although one worthy of some respect to the general populace. Since Corinth apparently lacked the office of quaestor, a subordinate of the aedile likely took on many functions of that financial office. Paul’s phrase probably describes a minor office of this sort.

This conclusion does not dismiss the significance of Erastus. He is likely to have succeeded in business, and Paul and others may have found his shipping contacts useful (Stansbury 1990: 323–24).

The question is, How could someone with this role have carried out his civic duties and maintained his social and political connections as a practicing Christian? The wealthier members of the Corinthian church would have faced enormous social pressure to conform to religious expectations, particularly those related to the imperial cult, if they were to advance or to preserve their place in society. This problem was the source of much of the tension between Paul and the wealthier members. This backdrop may shed light on Paul’s discussion of the issue of food

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8. What was the relationship between the Erastus of Rom. 16:23 and the Erastus of Acts 19:22? Were they the same person? Or were they father and son, or brothers, sharing the same cognomen? Or were they unrelated? Erastus is also named in 2 Tim. 4:20, where Paul says he remained in Corinth.

sacrificed to idols and why it would have been so problematic for many in the church.

## Misinterpretation of the Christian Faith

Since Paul reacts to what the Corinthians are saying, it seems imperative to try to reconstruct what they were thinking so as to understand better his responses. The method used, mirror-reading—reading what Paul says as in some measure mirroring what the Corinthians have said—is fraught with the danger of making mistakes, as the reasoning is necessarily circular (see Barclay 1987). When such reading is carried out injudiciously, the text can become the servant of preconceived impressions. The interpreter can read too much into what Paul says, read in his or her own biases, and misread Paul’s argumentation in a particular passage. Too often in the interpretation of this letter mirror-reading has been used incautiously and overconfidently. The forces shaping the Corinthians’ thoughts and actions have been attributed to a particular theological aberration rooted in Gnosticism, Jewish wisdom theology, or an “over-realized eschatology.” One theological misconception, however, is unlikely to explain the sundry problems Paul addresses in the letter. If Paul thought that a misrepresentation of the gospel he first preached to them lay behind their problems, then, Pickett (1997: 44–45) reasonably asks, “Why did he not provide them with a more explicitly theological corrective as he does, for example, in Galatians?” It is far more likely that the influences on them were more amorphous and that their behavior was swayed by culturally ingrained habits from their pagan past and by values instilled by a popularized secular ethics. It is imaginable that some of the prominent members thought “in a Stoicizing manner,” having been given a token education in this philosophy in their youth (Paige 1992). This body of opinions would have endorsed exalting the individual wise person at the expense of the community and would have permitted the wise to do whatever was right in his own judgment (Paige 1992: 189, 190).

The prominence of the references to the Spirit in this letter suggests that the Corinthians have misinterpreted their experience of the Spirit in some way. They may have understood the Spirit to be the inrush of heavenly power into their lives that granted them a new status and conferred upon them knowledge and great spiritual gifts. It could have fed their pride so that it grew to dangerous levels. They became “puffed up” and “arrogant” and fancied themselves to be “spiritual ones” (3:1; cf. 2:13, 15; 9:11; 12:1; 14:37), “mature” (2:6), and “wise” (3:18; 4:10). Spiritual gifts apparently were compared and some were judged more or less spiritual and more or less valuable according to the same criteria employed in secular culture. Certain gifts were championed over others, and certain persons displaying those gifts were championed over others

(3:21; 4:6–7). Paul cannot deny their spiritual experiences (2:4), nor does he want to denigrate them. But he will not address them as spiritual ones; they instead are fleshly (3:1), too much caught up in this world and its values. Everything occurring at Corinth proved his case: the power factions, the shocking case of incest, suing one another in pagan courts in order to get advantage over the other. Barclay (1992: 71) also reasons that “the more the Corinthians understood their faith as a special endowment of knowledge and a special acquisition of spiritual skills, the less they would expect to embrace hostility: any intimations of conflict would be resolved or minimized.”

Another problem that seems to have stunted their spiritual growth was their apparent misunderstanding of the end times and the last judgment. Some label the problem “over-realized eschatology” (Thiselton 1977–78) that took literally Paul’s assertion “Behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2) and created an overheated, spiritualistic illusion that they were already living in the kingdom come as if the day of the Lord had arrived (cf. 2 Thess. 2:2). I think that “over-realized eschatology” has been overplayed by interpreters. The Corinthians’ problems are more attributable to a *lack* of a clear eschatological vision of the defeat of the powers of this age and the final judgment of God looming on the horizon. They did not view this world as decisively evil and consequently were ready to make compromises with it. Barclay (1992: 71) opines, “The apocalyptic notes in Paul’s theology which harmonized so well with the Thessalonians’ experience failed to resonate with the Corinthians.”

### Paul’s Response

Pickett (1997: 29) states, “As an organizer of Christian communities who wrote letters to sustain and build up those communities, Paul’s main concern was with praxis, that is, with how members of the community lived out their faith convictions.” This letter, in particular, would corroborate that conclusion with its concerns for practical problems of Christian behavior and church administration. Paul’s response, however, is profoundly theological. He is interested in the Corinthians’ social, moral, spiritual, and theological development, since, for him, these things are all tied together. Grindheim (2002: 690) observes: “For Paul, sociology is indicative of theology.” Correct living is rooted in correct thinking about the significance of the cross, the belief in one God, the work of the Spirit, and the hope of the resurrection, to name only a few theological issues in the letter.

1. Paul seeks to thwart personal rivalries and quash elitist splinter groups to build up a harmonious community. M. Mitchell (1993) argues exhaustively that the letter has one central theme. It is a “unified and coherent appeal for unity and cessation of factionalism,” and M. Mitchell

finds this theme in every unit. Paul urges the Corinthians no longer to be driven by self-interest but to work together for the common good. The letter is laced with imagery of building up (3:9, 16; 6:19; 8:1; 10:23; 14:3–5, 12, 17, 26) as opposed to tearing down. The imagery of each member as a vital part of the body (12:12–28) drives home the point. God gives the Spirit to the church for one purpose, namely, to build up a harmonious community—not so that some Christians could claim superiority over other Christians.

2. Paul seeks to subvert the societal values antithetical to the wisdom of the cross that have infiltrated the church so that they will live cruciform lives modeled after Christ and his apostles. Paul clashes with and challenges the culture’s customary assessment of shame and honor “by promoting himself and Jesus Christ as figures of shame” (Stansbury 1990: 472). He revels in the “foolishness” of the cross as judged by the truly foolish wisdom of the world that dooms it to destruction. Paul expects submission to the cross to quash egoism and to lead all Christians to serve one another. Barrett (1968: 64) comments,

Of all the epistles, those to the Corinthians are most full of Christian paradox—of strength that is made perfect in weakness, of poor men who make many rich, of married men who are as if they had no wives, of those who have nothing but possess all things, who are the scum of the earth but lead it to salvation, who die and yet live; and the heart of the paradox is the preaching of the feeble and stupid message of the crucified Christ, which nevertheless proves to have a power and a wisdom no human eloquence possesses, since it is the power and wisdom of God himself.

One aspect of Paul’s response to the problem of egotism in the church is to shore up those on the lower end of the social scale. He reminds the Corinthians at the outset that God uses the weak, the low and despised in the world, and the things that are not to bring about change in the wise, the strong, and the things that are (A. Mitchell 1993: 570). His description of the social profile of the community in 1:26–31 should cause them to reevaluate the meaning of high, worldly status and to knock the props out from all human boasting. They must reassess what truly counts before God and rely on their status in Christ rather than their social status (Fee 1987: 84).

Paul also seeks to undermine the self-aggrandizement of the leading figures in the church by casting himself and Apollos as field hands, building contractors, and servants, and he identifies apostles as those who are indistinguishable from the dregs of society (4:10–13). He explains how becoming a slave to serve others and to gain them for Christ is integral to his understanding of his apostolic calling (9:19). He wants those leaders in the church who parade their status and look down on

others to do as he does, to lower themselves and accept a servile role that emulates Christ and himself. The basic principle is expounded in 10:32–11:1: “Be without blame with respect to Jews, Greeks, and the church of God just as I myself seek to please everyone in all things, not seeking my own advantage but that of the many in order that they be saved. Become imitators of me just as I am of Christ.”

Regarding the Corinthians’ interpretation of the Spirit, it seems that they believed the work of the Spirit was most apparent in unusual and impressive manifestations such as speaking in tongues. For Paul, the spiritual life of the church is not to be found in the visible things alone— healings, glossolalia, eloquent preaching. These are only things that the Corinthians use to show off. He writes, “We did not receive the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things which have been freely given to us by God” (2:12). The most central work of the Spirit is something that is unexpected. It leads believers to the crucified Christ (2:2) and to the glory that awaits the end of the age (2:9–10). In 2:4, he states that the Spirit was behind his first preaching to the Corinthians. In 2:13, he maintains that he spoke about God’s gracious acts toward them “not in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit, fitting spiritual things to spiritual expression.” The key result of the Spirit is communication about God and Christ that others can understand and that builds up the community of faith (14:1–5).

3. Paul’s opening prayer in 1:8 that they be “blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” broaches the issue of eschatology that the Corinthians appear to have neglected or misunderstood. He believes that the world is passing away and, in a certain sense, has already reached its end, and he “draws the corresponding consequences for anthropology and ethics” (Schrage 1964: 139). Doughty (1975: 69) contends that the eschatological language in the letter “functions to raise up a particular understanding of Christian existence.” He maintains, “Paul’s understanding of Christian existence is based on the recognition that ‘the present time’ (ὁ νῦν καιρός, *ho nyn kairos*) has been decisively qualified by God’s salvation deed in Christ (Rom 3:26).” Paul understands Christians to be living in the intersection of two ages, “the present evil age” and “the age to come.” As Soards (1999: 13) defines it, “The ‘present evil age’ is the world of mundane realities in which human beings live; the ‘age to come’ is the supernatural realm of the power of God.” This present age is marked by the rule of Satan, the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4). Its overlords are minions of Satan and as such are ignorant of God’s purposes and are doomed to perish (1 Cor. 2:6, 8). Its wisdom is faulty because it glorifies itself and not God (1:20; 2:6; 3:18). All who live according to its standards will meet with disaster on the day of the Lord Jesus Christ, which brings wrath and destruction for those who are not

in Christ. The day brings judgment through fire even for Christians (3:13).

Paul proclaims that the cross of Christ (1:17–18) and his resurrection have inaugurated the end of this age and its thralldom over humanity (10:11; cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). It has inaugurated the proleptic defeat of sin and death (15:54–57) and the reversal of the law’s curse and judgment. Christians have a foretaste of the age to come through the Spirit, but it is only a foretaste. They are destined for glory, but that final glory awaits the resurrection. Christ is Lord, and his rule must be evident in the way Christians live. Doughty (1975: 86) notes that baptism into Christ makes obedience possible: “That which makes obedience necessary and gives it meaning, however, is that the Christian continues to live in a world under the power of sin.”

Paul plays the eschatological card in every issue he addresses in the letter except the one concerning headdress in 11:2–16. It appears in the discussion of factions (2:6–8; 3:10–15, 16–17), incest (5:5), lawsuits (6:2–3, 9–10), sexual immorality (6:14), marriage (7:29–31), idol food (9:25; 10:11–13), the Lord’s Supper (11:26, 32), and spiritual gifts (13:8, 12). This theme reaches its climax with the long discussion of the resurrection, and it stamps his parting words: “If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. *Maranatha* [our Lord, come]!” (16:22).

The cross, its wisdom or its effect, is also pivotal in every issue except the one concerning headdress. It is central to his discussion of factions (1:18–31; 4:8–13) but also appears in his discussion of incest (5:7–8, “Cleanse out the old leaven, in order that you might be a new lump, just as you are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed”), lawsuits (6:7, “Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?”), sexual immorality (6:20, “For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body”), marriage (7:23, “You were bought for a price; do not become slaves of humans”), idol meat (8:11, “the brother for whose sake Christ died”), the Lord’s Supper (11:26, “you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes”), spiritual gifts (13:1–13, the principle of love), and the resurrection (15:3, “For I delivered to you among the first things, what I also received, that Christ died on behalf of our sins according to the Scriptures”).

### Paul’s Ministry in Corinth

Acts 18:11 reports that Paul stayed in Corinth for eighteen months (cf. Gal. 1:18; 2:1; Acts 19:10). Engels (1990: 112) suggests three reasons for the long stay. First, “as a major destination for traders, travelers, and tourists in the eastern Mediterranean, Corinth was an ideal location from which to spread word of a new religion.” Dio Chrysostom (*Or.* 8.9), in the guise of the philosopher Diogenes, describes the swarm attending the Isthmian games in this way:

That was the time, too, when one could hear crowds of wretched sophists around Poseidon's temple shouting and reviling one another, and their disciples, as they were called, fighting with one another, many writers reading aloud their stupid works, many poets reciting their poems while others applauded them, many jugglers showing their tricks, many fortune-tellers interpreting fortunes, lawyers innumerable perverting judgment, and peddlers not a few peddling whatever they happened to have.

Some of those who visited or immigrated to Corinth would be open to hearing the good news Paul preached.

Second, the city provided Paul an opportunity for some measure of economic independence. He could "practice his own trade as tentmaker since there was probably a high demand for his products: tents for sheltering visitors to the spring games, awnings for the retailers in the forum, and perhaps sails for merchant ships" (Engels 1990: 112).

Third, immigration (slaves and free) resulted in a population more open to something new like the gospel and its offer of new attachments, since they had severed their local ties and were living anonymously in a big city.

Acts 18:2 refers to the expulsion of Jews from Rome by the emperor Claudius, and Paul met in Corinth two of these Jewish refugees, Prisca and Aquila, who were Christians and fellow tentmakers. The decree has been dated to A.D. 49. Acts 18:12–17 also refers to Gallio as the proconsul of Achaia, and an inscription fragment dates his tenure in office from July 1, A.D. 51, to June 30, A.D. 52 (see Murphy-O'Connor 1983: 149–60, 178–82; Riesner 1998: 203–7).

Paul is hauled up on charges near the end of his stay and the beginning of Gallio's taking office (Haacker, *ABD* 2:902). Gallio probably shared the anti-Jewish sentiments of his brother, Seneca, and the Jews' expulsion from Rome may have caused him to be negatively disposed to them (Riesner 1998: 209). These dates suggest the founding of the church by Paul sometime in February/March A.D. 50 (Riesner 1998: 210). The accession of Gallio as proconsul seems to have brought Paul's successful activity in the city to an end (Riesner 1998: 210), and Paul leaves Corinth around September A.D. 51 for Ephesus. He then travels to Jerusalem before revisiting the Galatian churches (Acts 18:19–22) and establishing a base in Ephesus (Acts 19:8–10). After Paul left Corinth, the newly converted Apollos arrived for substantial work (Acts 18:27–19:1; 1 Cor. 3:6; 16:12), and Paul had to carry on his work in Corinth in absentia.

The church Paul founded was diverse and socially stratified. It would have had a Jewish component (7:18) along with Gentile proselytes and God-fearers partial to Judaism (see Trebilco 1991: 145–66), and former devotees of idols and folk religion (8:7). Some may have been Roman

citizens. Some were better off, while others belonged to the disenfranchised (foreigners and slaves). Acts 18:6–7 records Paul’s ministry in Corinth resulting in Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, and Titius Justus breaking away from the synagogue to join him.<sup>9</sup> De Vos (1999: 203–5) estimates that the church membership was on the order of one hundred, similar to the membership in many *collegia* (cf. Chow 1992: 204; Witherington 1995: 30–31, 114–15). De Vos thinks that with such large numbers they could have “met together monthly in a purpose-built club room,” which may have been provided by Gaius (Rom. 16:23). This makes the most sense of the reference to outsiders dropping into the church’s worship meetings. De Vos (1999: 205) thinks it unlikely that they would have dropped in uninvited to the house of someone who was an elite. They probably met weekly in different house churches, which may have been the hothouses for the rivalries that tore the church asunder.

### The Nature of Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians

First Corinthians is a private letter. It contains things one expects to find in private correspondence: specific information such as travel plans (16:5–9), proper names of individuals (1:14, 16; 16:10, 12, 17), and references to specific events (1:14–16; 2:1–4).<sup>10</sup> Much of the information and allusions that stump later interpreters would have been obvious to the original correspondents. As a private letter, it serves a particular purpose in a particular moment in time when a particular decision had to be made. Anderson (1999) raises a serious challenge to the recent trend to interpret the letter using ancient rhetorical theory. There is a danger that a method that is a useful accessory to interpretation can become all-embracing, overelaborate, and rigidly applied. Anderson (1999: 264–65) argues against M. Mitchell (1993) that the letter cannot be “analysed in terms of sustained rhetorical argumentation,” because it “bears little resemblance to a rhetorical speech.” Paul’s letter writing was informal. He used rhetorical devices but was not constrained by the rules of formal rhetoric. Demetrius’s comments on epistolary style continued to govern the practice of formal letter writing. He allowed that the letter was like a dialogue except it is not extemporary utterance. It

9. The departure of such prominent figures could only have been perceived by other Jews as a humiliating loss. They may also have been concerned that this messianic sect would arrogate to themselves unique privileges and exemptions accorded the Jewish religious tradition (see Winter 1999). They attempted to rectify this slight to their honor through the courts by bringing the case before Gallio (Acts 18:12–17).

10. Paul mentions fourteen persons by name: Sosthenes (1:1), Apollos (1:12; 3:4, 5, 6, 22; 4:6; 16:12), Timothy (4:17; 16:10), Barnabas (9:6), Cephas (1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5), James (15:7), Chloe (1:11), Crispus (1:14), Gaius (1:14), Stephanas (1:16; 16:15, 17), Fortunatus (16:17), Achaicus (16:17), and Aquila and Priscilla (16:19).

is “committed to writing and is (in a way) sent as a gift” (*Eloc.* 224) and is not “a speech for the law courts” (*Eloc.* 229). Demetrius (*Eloc.* 228) also advises that the length of a letter should be “kept within bounds.” The length of 1 Corinthians certainly exceeds those bounds, and some have claimed that it consists of more than one piece of correspondence (see Sellin 1987: 2964–82; 1991). The various and sundry partition theories have been satisfactorily refuted by Merklein (1984), Belleville (1987), and M. Mitchell (1993), and need not occupy us. Suffice it to say that Paul cannot be circumscribed by rhetorical or epistolary straitjackets (see L. Alexander 1989). He often sets off on his own path.

## Occasion

Paul writes this letter from Ephesus before Pentecost (16:8), probably in the spring of 54 or 55 (Schrage 1991: 36; Thiselton 2000: 31–32). He is trying to keep up a long-distance relationship with this church without the benefit of the modern communication technology to which we are accustomed. The letter serves as his substitute presence. He has written a previous letter to the Corinthians that included the admonition not to associate with the sexually immoral (5:9). What precipitated that letter is unclear, and despite attempts of some scholars to find remnants of it embedded in the extant letters, it remains lost to us. The existence of this previous letter and Paul’s comments about it in 5:9–11 reveal two things. First, it means that 1 Corinthians should not be read as if it were a series of essays on different themes. It is the continuation of an ongoing conversation between Paul and the church. Second, his comments reveal that he is acutely aware that he could be misunderstood. He is painfully conscious of this fact when he carefully qualifies what he says, for example, in 4:14; 9:15; and 10:19. The problem is that written correspondence is susceptible to misinterpretation even when the bearer of the letter is deputized to interpret what it means and particularly if a reader/auditor is ill-disposed to receive what is being said. Since Paul directly challenges the behavior of those who are likely to be powerful figures in the church, the potential is ever present for the targets of his ethical shafts to twist and distort his remarks. Not only must Paul persuade the culprits to change their behavior, but also he must garner the support of the entire community for them to exert moral suasion and authority over the miscreants.

This second letter to Corinth has been prompted by oral reports from Chloe’s people about the factional infighting in the church (1:11). Paul also has gotten wind of the case of incest (5:1), the factions at the Lord’s Supper (11:18, “I hear there are factions among you”), and their confusion over the concept of the resurrection of the dead (15:12, “some among you are saying”). We cannot exclude the possibility that he also

got an earful from Stephanas and his companions about the situation in Corinth and possibly also from Apollos, but he does not name them as sources. The Corinthians have also sent him a letter (7:1), probably carried by Stephanas, with various queries. In response, Paul alternates between reactions to the oral reports and answers to the Corinthian letter (Terry 1995: 43):

- Oral reports (1:10–4:17 / 4:18–6:20)
- Corinthian letter (7:1–40 / 8:1–11:1)
- Oral reports (11:2–34)
- Corinthian letter (12:1–14:40)
- Oral reports (15:1–58)
- Corinthian letter (16:1–12)

The relationship between Paul and the church has not yet deteriorated to the stage it is in when he writes 2 Corinthians, and the situation that this later letter depicts *should not* be read into the interpretation of 1 Corinthians. Paul is not on the defensive in this letter as he is in 2 Corinthians.

Overall, the letter may be summed up as a warning against various perils to which the Corinthians imagine themselves to be immune or are simply oblivious. He warns against the perils of cliques and power factions that rip the fabric of the church's unity (1:10–4:21), of sexual immorality (5:1–7:40), of idolatry (8:1–11:1), of cliques and power factions that sabotage the church's worship (11:2–14:40), and of denying the resurrection of the dead (15:1–58). To prevent them from plummeting into an abyss, he brings them back to his first preaching of the cross and his first preaching of the resurrection. Goulder (2001: 230) describes the letter as a "masterpiece, hard to fault: it is fair-minded, diplomatic, straightforward, dignified, principled, vigorous, fatherly, conciliatory." I find this description of the letter hard to fault.

- I. Letter opening (1:1–3)
- II. Thanksgiving for God's grace given to them (1:4–9)
- III. Factions and dissension in the church (1:10–4:21)
  - A. The report of their factions (1:10–17)
  - B. The foolish wisdom of the cross (1:18–25)
  - C. God's choice of the foolish (1:26–31)
  - D. Human wisdom versus the Spirit and power of God (2:1–5)
  - E. The Spirit's revelation of God's wisdom (2:6–16)
  - F. Evaluating the work of God's servants (3:1–17)
  - G. How to regard oneself; how to regard others (3:18–4:5)
  - H. The apostles as models of the wisdom of the cross (4:6–13)
  - I. Appeal to imitate their father Paul (4:14–21)

- IV. Incest, lawsuits, and prostitution (5:1–6:20)**
  - A. The case of incest (5:1–8)
  - B. Renewed warnings about tolerance of sin in the church (5:9–13)
  - C. Admonition against lawsuits (6:1–11)
  - D. Admonition against visiting prostitutes (6:12–20)
- V. Instructions about sexual relations, divorce, and marriage (7:1–40)**
  - A. Sexual relations within marriage (7:1–5)
  - B. Celibacy or marriage for the unmarried and widows (7:6–9)
  - C. Instructions about divorce for those married to Christians and for those married to non-Christians (7:10–16)
  - D. Guiding principle underlying the discussion: remain as you are (7:17–24)
  - E. The advisability of marriage for the betrothed and for widows (7:25–40)
- VI. The dispute over food sacrificed to idols (8:1–11:1)**
  - A. Introduction of the issue of idol food (8:1–6)
  - B. Refutation of their practice because of its danger to fellow Christians (8:7–13)
  - C. Paul's own example to undergird his counsel (9:1–27)
    - 1. Paul's right as an apostle to receive support (9:1–14)
    - 2. Paul's freedom used to spread the gospel (9:15–23)
    - 3. Paul's self-discipline: an example from the world of athletics (9:24–27)
  - D. Refutation of their practice from the negative example of the history of Israel in the wilderness (10:1–13)
  - E. Refutation of their practice from the example of the Lord's Supper (10:14–22)
  - F. Practical advice for dealing with the issue of idol food in pagan settings (10:23–11:1)
- VII. Headdress in public worship (11:2–16)**
- VIII. Divisions at the Lord's Supper (11:17–34)**
- IX. The use of spiritual gifts in public worship (12:1–14:40)**
  - A. Introduction of the topic of spiritual gifts (12:1–3)
  - B. Variety and unity of spiritual gifts (12:4–11)
  - C. The diversity and interdependence of members of the body (12:12–31)
  - D. Love: a more excellent way (13:1–13)
  - E. The comparison between tongues and prophecy (14:1–19)
  - F. The preference for prophecy (14:20–25)
  - G. Regulations for worship and concluding instructions on spiritual gifts (14:26–40)

- X. The resurrection (15:1–58)**
  - A. Prologue: preaching and belief about the resurrection of Christ (15:1–11)
  - B. The consequences if the resurrection of the dead is not true (15:12–19)
  - C. The consequences since the resurrection of the dead is true (15:20–28)
  - D. The consequences if the resurrection of the dead were not true (15:29–34)
  - E. The bodily character of the resurrection (15:35–49)
  - F. All will be changed (15:50–58)
- XI. Instructions for the collection and travel itineraries (16:1–12)**
- XII. Letter closing (16:13–24)**

- I. Letter Opening (1:1–3)
- II. Thanksgiving for God’s Grace Given to Them (1:4–9)
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## I. Letter Opening (1:1–3)

Conventional Hellenistic letters opened with a simple basic formula, “A to B, greetings” (χαίρειν, *chairein*), or “To B from A, greetings,” followed by a wish for good health (see Exler 1923: 60–66; J. L. White 1986: 198–200). Paul’s christological convictions lead him to modify this standard greeting. He is not an ordinary correspondent but one who writes with apostolic authority from God. He has been chosen by God and addresses the Corinthian congregation as God’s representative. The recipients are not ordinary people but a society established and set apart by God. The greetings are not ordinary good wishes but blessings of grace and peace that reflect the spiritual reality brought about through God’s act in the death and resurrection of Christ. When the greetings in Paul’s letters are compared synoptically, the slight variations reveal some of the concerns that occupy him in writing the letter. In this letter, Paul emphasizes the unity of the one church of God, which is set apart as holy and integrally bound to all across the world who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Corinth is a Roman colony established to spread Roman ideology, but the church in Corinth is God’s. By identifying Jesus as Lord, he subtly denies this title to Caesar.

### Exegesis and Exposition

<sup>1</sup>Paul, called [to be] an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, and Sosthenes the brother. <sup>2</sup>To the church of God that is in Corinth, sanctified in Christ Jesus, called [to be] saints together with all those who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, theirs and ours. <sup>3</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- 1:1 Paul identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ by God’s call (cf. 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1). As an apostle *called by God* and not by the church, he is beholden to no one congregation. God’s will alone determines his calling and life, and God alone is the ultimate appraiser of all that he does (Danker 1989: 29; cf. 4:3–4). We need not jump to the conclusion that he intends to pull rank on them and establish his authority over them from the outset (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28–29; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10). He does not write to issue pronouncements but to inform, instruct, clarify, persuade (10:15), and interpret (7:10–16). Nor does he write to defend his apostleship (contra Fee 1987: 28–30; cf. the introduction to 9:1–27 be-

low). Thiselton (2000: 45) corrects this common misinterpretation: “Paul sees his apostleship not as an instrument of power but as a call to become a transparent agency through whom the crucified and raised Christ becomes portrayed through lifestyle, thought, and utterance.”

The title “apostle of Jesus Christ” encompasses a matrix of ideas. The term is connected to the Hebrew *šāliah*, “sent man” (Agnew 1986: 83). In the NT, apostles are witnesses to Christ’s resurrection (9:1; 15:3–9), though not all witnesses to the resurrection are apostles. The key phrase is “called through the will of God.” It conveys that Paul did not choose this ministry as a promising career path nor was he nominated for it by human authorities (Gal. 1:1). He was captured and constrained by God’s sovereign call, which makes him into something he was not (Gal. 1:15–16; 2 Cor. 5:14). He interprets this beckoning as an outpouring of God’s grace because of his unworthiness for the role as one who previously persecuted the church (15:9–10). The verbal idea in apostle (ἀποστέλλω, *apostellō*) implies being sent out by Jesus Christ. As Edwards (1885: 2) aptly puts it, Paul was “called out of the world to be sent to the world.” The call confers on him a missionary commission to carry the gospel to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:16; 2:7; Rom. 11:13; 2 Cor. 10:13–16; Eph. 3:1–2), which determines both the direction of his ministry, from Jerusalem to Illyricum to Rome to Spain (Rom. 15:19, 24), and the recipients of his ministry (Gal. 2:8). He understands himself to be sent by Christ to speak authoritatively the full truth of the gospel (1:17), to placard Christ crucified (Gal. 3:1; Litfin 1994: 196), and to establish churches. He and his team were “the first to come all the way to you with the good news of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:13–14), and he performed the signs of a true apostle (2 Cor. 12:12). Their founding as a church is the seal of his apostleship (9:2; 2 Cor. 3:2–3), and he remains responsible for them as their father in the faith (4:14–21).

Paul passed on to them the traditions about Jesus (11:23; 15:3), and he continues to interpret for them the meaning of these traditions (7:10–16) as one who has received mercy from God to be a trustworthy interpreter (7:25), guided by the Spirit of God (7:40), and having insights into the mystery of God (2:7–13; Eph. 3:5) and the mind of Christ (2:16). The statement of Jesus in John 13:16, “the messenger [ἀπόστολος] is not greater than the one who sent him,” recalls this maxim: “The one whom a man sends is like the man himself.” Paul understands that being Christ’s emissary requires him to imitate Christ and to be imitated himself by others (4:16; 11:1) as he becomes a living paradigm of the gospel and the scandal of the cross. He incarnates the weakness of the cross as one exhibited as last of all, as one sentenced to death, and as a spectacle to the world (4:9). He makes himself a slave to all so that he might win others to Christ (9:19), which is why apostles are both first (12:28) and last (4:9; 15:8; Thiselton 2000: 66).

With the exception of Romans, Paul always mentions co-senders in his salutation—an unusual feature compared with other extant letters from this period. Prior (1989: 39–42) contends that Sosthenes was the scribe who wrote the letter, but why would a scribe insert his name in the salutation as a co-sender (cf. Tertius, who identifies himself as the writer of the letter in Rom. 16:22)? Murphy-O'Connor (1993: 562–79) infers from the use of “we” in 1:18–31 and 2:6–16 that Sosthenes had a more extensive hand in the writing of the letter than the average scribe. Thiselton (2000: 69), however, offers the most convincing explanation for Paul’s inclusion of Sosthenes in the greeting: “Paul does not perceive himself as commissioned to lead or to minister as an isolated individual, without collaboration with co-workers.” He is not a maverick apostle but part of a ministry team.<sup>1</sup>

Sosthenes must have been known to the Corinthians, since Paul identifies him only as “the brother.”<sup>2</sup> We cannot prove that he is the same Sosthenes named in Acts 18:17 as the “ruler of the synagogue.” After the case against Paul before the governor Gallio collapsed, Acts reports that “all” beat Sosthenes but does not specify which group did this or why. Was it the Jews irate over his mismanagement of the case or his sympathies with Paul, or the Greeks taking advantage of a Jew out of favor with the authorities (Barrett 1968: 875)? Acts does not report his conversion as it does that of Crispus, another ruler of the synagogue (Acts 18:8), and Paul does not list Sosthenes as one of those he baptized in Corinth as he does Crispus (1 Cor. 1:14). His name, however, may have been remembered and cited in the Acts narrative because he was known to have become a Christian.<sup>3</sup> The evidence does not allow us to say much more.

**1:2** Corinth was no ordinary city as a Roman colony, but in contrast to secular letters that lauded the fame and status of the recipients’ locale, Paul pays no compliments to the city. The important thing about Corinth is the recipients of this letter. They are not ordinary people but a consecrated society established by God, called by God, and set apart as God’s people in Corinth. Paul’s use of the phrase “church of God” (ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ, *ekklēsia tou theou*), inherited from Scripture, has

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1. Apollos (16:12) appears to be independent of Paul, which may explain why he is not named as a co-sender.

2. “Brother” becomes a title for Christians (cf. 2 Cor. 1:1; 8:18, 22; Philem. 1), which conveys that they are “all sons and daughters of the one Father” (Barrett 1968: 31; cf. Matt. 23:9).

3. Myrou (1999) makes an interesting but unprovable claim that Crispus and Sosthenes are the same person and that Crispus was renamed Sosthenes by Paul. Crispus can mean “curly” or “unsteady,” and Sosthenes means “steady in strength.” Paul made the change in the same way he made a play on the meaning of the name of Onesimus (useless/useful) in Philem. 11. Crispus is not unsteady but steady.

three implications. First, Schrage (1991: 102) contends that in Greek usage ἐκκλησία refers predominantly to a political assembly (cf. 14:28, 34). Thiselton (2000: 75) claims, “The words stress the call *to assemble together as a congregation* in God’s presence.” The Corinthians’ assembly is, then, distinguished from all other assemblies that might gather in Corinth as one that belongs to God (10:32; 11:16, 22; 15:9) and confesses Jesus Christ as Lord. The possessive τοῦ θεοῦ (*tou theou*, of God) clarifies that the church is not some “man-made organization” created to preserve and promulgate particular religious traditions (Bornkamm 1971: 178–79) or a society of like-minded persons governed by human aspirations and values.<sup>4</sup> The church of God makes claims to exclusive truth in contrast to voluntary associations that “were typically more concerned with fellowship and good times than with claims of salvation” (McCready 1996: 62). In the political assembly, the art of elegant rhetorical persuasion is paramount; in the assembly of God, the proclamation of Christ crucified, delivered in weakness, fear, and trembling, and the demonstration of the Spirit’s power are utmost.

Second, Paul’s use of the singular “church” (cf. 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1) differs from the plural he tends to use in other letters, which refer to “all God’s beloved” (Rom. 1:7) or “to all the saints” (Phil. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:2). There probably was more than one house church in Corinth, but by addressing them as one church the emphasis falls on their unity as the people of God, a chord that is struck throughout the letter (cf. 3:9, 16, 23; 10:17; 12:12–13, 27; Belleville 1987: 17).

Third, the term was used in the LXX for the people of Israel. Applied to the church at Corinth, it underscores their continuity with God’s people of old (cf. 10:1).

This one church is composed of the sanctified (ἡγιασμένοι, *hēgiasmenoi*; 1:30; 6:11), who are called to be saints (ἅγιοι, *hagioi*). Voluntary associations in this era never used the epithet ἅγιοι to identify themselves, yet it marks the fundamental identity of the Christian assembly. This epithet recalls Lev. 19:2: “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (NRSV). O. Evans (1974–75: 197) delineates the Jewish background of the word “sanctified” as an eschatological concept describing “the true Israel, the Elect People of God, consecrated to serve his righteous cause in battle against his enemies and destined to share in the glories of his kingdom.” Designating them as “saints” has at least four implications. First, they are “saints” by God’s call (as Paul is an apostle by God’s call). The translation “called to be saints” may imply that this is some goal they must attain, but the Corinthians already

4. Paul may be subtly cautioning the church’s patrons that though the assembly might gather in their house and be aided by their patronage, it is not their church.

are “saints” in the same way that Paul already is an apostle. As Paul did not achieve his apostleship, so they do not achieve holiness but receive it (Conzelmann 1975: 21). Second, belonging to the holy people of God qualifies them as saints set apart to serve God’s purposes, not their own. All Christians are equally holy so that none is to be regarded “saintlier” (in the modern sense) than others. Third, they are called to a particular lifestyle and are bound by moral strictures and standards of behavior because God is holy (Lev. 19:1–2; Exod. 19:5–6; 22:31; 1 Cor. 3:17; cf. 1 Thess. 4:3; 5:23). They are to embody values that are radically different from those in their surrounding culture. Fourth, the term “saints” has corporate significance, as O. Evans (1974–75: 198) recognizes, “The saints’ are not an aggregate of individuals who are characterized by a special quality of holiness; they are a holy community.” They are not set apart from the world as lone saints but set apart with others as a community of saints with obligations to one another as well as to God. One of the hallmarks of holiness is *wholeness*, and Paul wants this church to be whole and without divisions to represent God’s holiness to the world.

The phrase σὺν πᾶσιν (*syn pasin*) is not to be taken with τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ (*tē ekklēsia tou theou*), as if Paul were addressing all Christians along with the Corinthians (Robertson and Plummer 1914: 2). Paul simply wishes to remind them that the church of God extends beyond Corinth. They were called to be saints *together with* all those who “call upon the name of the Lord in every place.” “Every place” may reflect Jewish usage referring to their meeting-places (see Lietzmann 1949: 5; Conzelmann 1975: 23 n. 40 for the synagogue inscriptions), which Paul could apply to Christian meeting-places (cf. 1 Thess. 1:8; 1 Tim. 2:8). When Paul describes himself as being led in a triumphal procession that causes the fragrance of knowing Christ to spread to “every place” (2 Cor. 2:14), however, he connects it to the church’s worldwide mission (so Conzelmann 1975: 23 n. 40; M. Mitchell 1993: 194). “Every place” may allude instead to the dispersal of Christians throughout the world (Belleville 1987: 18). “The church of God that is in Corinth” is not the center of God’s witness in the world but simply a constituent part of that witness. The phrase “theirs and ours” is somewhat confusing. It could refer to “their *place* and ours” (Edwards 1885: 4) or “their *Lord* and ours” since all Christians share a common Lord (Godet 1886: 47). Paul intends the latter (cf. Rom. 10:12, “the same is Lord of all”), which thematically prepares the way for his question “Is Christ divided?” (1:13).

In Paul’s greetings, we usually find a remark that anticipates one of the main topics to be discussed in the balance of the epistle (O. Evans 1982: 192–93). Here, he notes their calling to sanctity that bonds them to others. As a Roman colony, Corinth was the center of Roman pres-

ence and influence in the province of Achaia. The surrounding Achaean neighbors were tied to the Greek past and had become their social inferiors. The letter betrays that an attitude of superiority had crept into the church at Corinth and was destroying their solidarity. By linking them with “all those who call upon the Lord in every place” and underscoring that it is “their [Lord] and ours,” Paul sounds a universal note that undermines their independent streak and egotism.<sup>5</sup> As Thiselton (2000: 74) remarks, “They are not the only pebble on the beach.” They do not “possess Christ for themselves alone” (Robertson and Plummer 1914: 3). This universalizing reference does two other things as well. It sets up Paul’s appeals to the practice in all the churches as a guide for the Corinthians’ conduct (7:17; 11:16; 14:33, 36), and it lays the foundation for his later request for them to make a charitable contribution to Christians in Jerusalem (16:1–4).

Those who call upon the name of the Lord are converted and believe in his name (cf. Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:12–14; cf. 1 Cor. 6:11), proclaim his name, offer prayer and devotion to him in worship (cf. 16:22; Acts 9:14, 21; 22:16), and are prepared to suffer for him (Cullmann 1964: 12).<sup>6</sup> Dunn (1998: 247) comments that the title “Lord” denotes “dominance and the right of disposal of superior over inferior—whether simply master over slave, king over subject, or, by extension, God over worshiper. To confess someone as one’s ‘lord’ expresses an attitude of subserviency and a sense of belonging or devotion to the one so named.” Calling upon the Lord acknowledges that he is master and we are his slaves (6:19–20). Since “Lord” appears frequently in the LXX for Yahweh, to call upon Christ as Lord intimately connects him to God as a divine figure. Thiselton (2000: 79) comments that to call upon the Lord is “not to invoke some shadowy, unknown deity, but to commit oneself in trust to the one whose nature and character have been disclosed as worthy of this trust.” The confession binds them to the one Lord (8:5–6) and to all other believers. It also severs them from those who insist that Caesar is the world’s lord. Paul names Jesus as Christ three times in this brief salutation. N. Wright (1992: 41–49) claims that Paul understands the term “Christ” specifically to mean the Messiah, the king of Israel, and takes for granted that Israel’s king, who accomplishes God’s purposes on earth, is the world’s king (cf. Ps. 72:8; Isa. 11:10; 1 Cor. 15:25–28). Paul wants to bind the Corinthian Christians to other believers across the world, however remote, and to cut them off from any deleterious allegiances to their unbelieving neighbors closer at hand.

“Grace and peace” are not simply the ordinary good wishes of a greeting. Many assume that Paul christianized the secular epistolary greet-

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5. Weiss (1910: xli, 4) is wrong to attribute this universalizing note to a later editor.

6. The middle voice (ἐπικαλούμενοι, *epikaloumenois*) intensifies the calling.

ing *χαίρειν* (*chairein*, hail; Acts 15:23; James 1:1) by changing it to *χάρις* (*charis*, grace) and combining it with the Jewish greeting of *שלום* (*šālôm*, peace; cf. Dan. 4:1 LXX; 2 Bar. 78:2; *b. Sanh.* 11b).<sup>7</sup> S. Porter (*DPL* 698) contends, however, “There is little substantive evidence from Greek Jewish letters of the time that superscriptions with ‘peace’ were used as a convention that Paul might have borrowed.”<sup>8</sup> S. Porter thinks that it was created by Paul “to emphasize the comprehensive work of God: it is one of gracious giving and forgiveness for previous hostility” (cf. Rom. 5:1; 15:13; Eph. 2:14; Col. 1:20). It is a “wish-prayer” (Lindemann 2000: 28, who argues that the optative copula “may be” is to be supplied) and not just a perfunctory greeting, because Paul expands it to include the agent who fulfills the prayer: “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Thiselton 2000: 81). Paul does not offer them his own greetings but those of God and Christ, who stand intimately together, because he does not write simply as a friend but as God’s and Christ’s apostle. Through this letter, he wishes to establish their presence in the community, not just his own, and extends to them the peace Jesus bestowed on his disciples (John 20:21). “Grace and peace” express his deep theological convictions about what God had accomplished in Christ: “grace” is the source of Christian life, and “peace” is its consummation (Edwards 1885: 5).

Again, this greeting is subversive. The peace offered by God through Jesus Christ rivals that of the peace established and propagated by the emperor, who is passed off as the world’s great savior and benefactor. Tacitus (*Agricola* 30.5) has the British general Calgacus attempt to rally his troops before battle with the Romans by saying, “To plunder, butcher, steal these things they misname empire: they make a desolation and call it peace” (cited by Wengst 1987: 52).

7. Cf. the discussions in Lohmeyer (1927), Friedrich (1956), and Berger (1974).

8. “Peace” appears in all the greetings of letters attributed to Paul (Rom. 1:7; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philem. 4) and in many of the closing benedictions (Rom. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:11; Gal. 6:16; Eph. 6:23; 2 Thess. 3:16; cf. Phil. 4:9).