

THE PILLAR NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

General Editor

D. A. CARSON



*The First Letter to the*  
**CORINTHIANS**

Roy E. Ciampa  
*and*  
Brian S. Rosner

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## Contents

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <i>Editor's Preface</i>                             | xiv      |
| <i>Authors' Preface</i>                             | xvi      |
| <i>Chief Abbreviations</i>                          | xvii     |
| <i>Select Bibliography</i>                          | xxii     |
| <br>  |          |
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b>                                 | <b>1</b> |
| <br>  |          |
| I. THE CHURCH IN CORINTH                            | 2        |
| A. Roman Corinth                                    | 2        |
| B. The Church "Belonging to God"                    | 3        |
| <br>  |          |
| II. THE IDENTITY AND AIMS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL       | 6        |
| A. Paul the Jew                                     | 7        |
| B. Paul the Roman Citizen                           | 8        |
| C. Paul the Follower of Jesus                       | 9        |
| D. Paul the Eschatological Herald                   | 9        |
| E. Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles                 | 13       |
| 1. <i>The Dynamics of Pagan Sin—Romans 1</i>        | 16       |
| 2. <i>Gentile Conversion—1 Thessalonians 1:9-10</i> | 17       |
| 3. <i>Paul's Missionary Agenda—Romans 15</i>        | 17       |
| <br>  |          |
| III. THE INTERPRETATION OF 1 CORINTHIANS            | 19       |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| A. The Structure of 1 Corinthians                            | 21 |
| B. The Argument of 1 Corinthians                             | 25 |
| C. The Biblical-Theological Framework of 1 Corinthians       | 28 |
| 1. <i>Two Key Old Testament Texts</i>                        | 28 |
| 2. <i>Four Key Themes</i>                                    | 32 |
| D. 1 Corinthians in Recent Research                          | 35 |
| 1. <i>Biblical and Jewish Background</i>                     | 36 |
| 2. <i>Greco-Roman Foreground</i>                             | 37 |
| 3. <i>The Social Sciences</i>                                | 38 |
| 4. <i>Classical Rhetoric</i>                                 | 39 |
| 5. <i>Theology and Exposition</i>                            | 41 |
| E. Some Features of This Commentary                          | 41 |
| 1. <i>The Use of Greek and the Question of Verbal Aspect</i> | 42 |
| 2. <i>The Format of Major Sections</i>                       | 46 |
| 3. <i>The Value of 1 Corinthians</i>                         | 47 |
| 4. <i>A Biblical/Jewish Approach to the Letter</i>           | 52 |

## COMMENTARY ON 1 CORINTHIANS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| I. LETTER OPENING, 1:1-9  | 53 |
| A. Salutation, 1:1-3  | 53 |
| 1. <i>The Sender(s): Paul, Apostle of Jesus Christ<br/>            (and Sosthenes), 1:1</i>   | 53 |
| 2. <i>The Addressees: The Church in Corinth as God's Holy<br/>            People under the Universal Lordship of Christ, 1:2</i>                            | 55 |
| 3. <i>The Greeting: Divine Eschatological Blessing, 1:3</i>   | 59 |
| B. Thanksgiving, 1:4-9  | 60 |
| 1. <i>For the Grace of God Already Received in Christ, 1:4-6</i>  | 62 |
| 2. <i>For the Gifts of Grace Which Sustain Us Until Our<br/>            Anticipated Approval by God on the Day of the Lord<br/>            Jesus, 1:7-9</i> | 65 |
| II. TRUE AND FALSE WISDOM AND CORINTHIAN<br>FACTIONALISM, 1:10-4:17   | 68 |
| A. Request for Unity, 1:10-17   | 72 |

| <i>Contents</i> |   | vii |
|-----------------|---|-----|
| 1.              | <i>Initial Request, 1:10</i>  | 72  |
| 2.              | <i>Report of Factionalism, 1:11-12</i>  | 77  |
| 3.              | <i>Reminder of Believers' Identity in Christ, 1:13-17</i>   | 82  |
| B.              | <b>Condemnation of False Wisdom: The Wisdom of this World, 1:18-2:5</b>   | 88  |
| 1.              | <i>Denunciation of Human Wisdom: The Message of a Crucified Christ, 1:18-25</i>   | 88  |
| a.              | <i>The Cross Divides the Human Race Absolutely, 1:18-21</i>   | 90  |
| b.              | <i>The Cross Outsmarts Human Wisdom and Overpowers Human Strength, 1:22-25</i>  | 98  |
| 2.              | <i>Reminder of God's Unexpected Choice of the Lowly in Corinth: Worldly Wisdom in the Light of Divine Election, 1:26-31</i> | 102 |
| 3.              | <i>Reminder of Paul's Ministry Strategy: Worldly Wisdom in the Light of Paul's Unimpressive Preaching in Corinth, 2:1-5</i> | 111 |
| a.              | <i>Paul's Humble Demeanor Suited His Message, 2:1-3</i>   | 113 |
| b.              | <i>Paul's Plain Speech Suited His Message, 2:4</i>  | 116 |
| c.              | <i>Paul's Purpose Was That the Corinthians' Trust Would Be in God's Power and Not in Human Wisdom, 2:5</i>                  | 118 |
| C.              | <b>Affirmation of True Wisdom: The Wisdom of the Cross and the Spirit, 2:6-3:4</b>  | 119 |
| 1.              | <i>Theme Statement: "We Speak Wisdom among the Mature," 2:6a</i>  | 121 |
| 2.              | <i>Exposition of "Wisdom": Source and Revelation, 2:6b-12</i>   | 124 |
| a.              | <i>The Source of This Wisdom Is God, 2:6b-7</i>   | 125 |
| b.              | <i>The Revelation of This Wisdom Came to the Apostles and Prophets through the Holy Spirit, 2:8-12</i>                      | 126 |
| 3.              | <i>Exposition of "We Speak": Words of the Spirit, 2:13</i>  | 132 |
| 4.              | <i>Exposition of "the Mature": The Spiritual Person, 2:14-16</i>  | 134 |
| a.              | <i>The Reception of This Wisdom Is Not Possible for the Person without the Spirit, 2:14</i>                                 | 134 |
| b.              | <i>The Reception of This Wisdom Is Possible for the Person with the Spirit, 2:15-16</i>                                     | 136 |
| 5.              | <i>Rebuke for Immaturity: The Worldliness of the Corinthians, 3:1-4</i>   | 139 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| D. Reflections on the Nature of Christian Leadership, 3:5-4:17                               | 142 |
| 1. <i>Metaphors for the Church and Its Leaders: God's Garden Temple, 3:5-23</i>              | 142 |
| a. The Corinthians Are God's Cultivated Field, 3:5-9   | 143 |
| b. The Corinthians Are God's Building, 3:10-15   | 150 |
| c. The Corinthians Are God's Garden-Temple, 3:16-17  | 157 |
| d. Reprise and Summary: All Things Belong to God, 3:18-23                                    | 161 |
| 2. <i>Application: The Apostles as Models of the Wisdom of the Cross, 4:1-17</i>             | 169 |
| a. Regard Ministers as God's Servants and Estate Managers, 4:1-5                             | 169 |
| b. The Corinthians Are Exalted While the Apostles Are Abased, 4:6-13                         | 174 |
| c. Paul Admonishes Them as Their Father and Model, 4:14-17                                   | 185 |
| III. "Flee Sexual Immorality" and "Glorify God with Your Bodies," 4:18-7:40                  | 189 |
| A. Condemnation of Illicit Sexual Relations: "Flee Sexual Immorality" (and Greed), 4:18-6:20 | 192 |
| 1. <i>A Stern Warning: Paul's Impending Visit, 4:18-21</i>                                   | 194 |
| 2. <i>A Virulent Ruling: The Case of Incest, 5:1-13</i>                                      | 196 |
| a. The Corinthians Should Remove the Immoral Man, 5:1-2                                      | 198 |
| b. Paul's Authority Stands behind the Expulsion, 5:3-5                                       | 204 |
| c. The Metaphor of Yeast Validates the Expulsion, 5:6-8                                      | 212 |
| d. The Corinthians Should Separate from Immoral Believers, 5:9-11                            | 215 |
| e. The Corinthians Should "expel the wicked person," 5:12-13                                 | 219 |
| 3. <i>An Exasperated Rebuke: Civil Litigation in the Family of God, 6:1-11</i>               | 221 |
| a. The Corinthians Should Settle Their Own Disputes, 6:1-6                                   | 225 |
| b. The Corinthians Should Be Willing to Suffer Wrong, 6:7-8                                  | 234 |
| c. The Corinthians Should Suffer Now and Inherit Later, 6:9-11                               | 237 |

| <i>Contents</i> |  | ix  |
|-----------------|--|-----|
| 4.              | <i>A Firm Correction: Temple Prostitution, 6:12-17</i>   | 245 |
|                 | a. The Bodily Resurrection of Christ Underscores the Sanctity and Future of the Believer's Body, 6:12-14                   | 251 |
|                 | b. Union with Christ Excludes Union with a Prostitute, 6:15-17   | 257 |
| 5.              | <i>A Strong Admonition: The Incongruence of Sexual Immorality and Christian Identity, 6:18-20</i>                          | 261 |
| B.              | <b>Affirmation of Sexual Purity: "Glorify God with Your Bodies," 7:1-40</b>  | 266 |
| 1.              | <i>Counsel concerning Various Marital Statuses, 7:1-16</i>   | 272 |
|                 | a. For the Married: Maintain Sexual Relations, 7:1-7   | 272 |
|                 | b. For Widowers and Widows: Stay Unmarried, 7:8-9  | 286 |
|                 | c. For Christian Married Couples: Do Not Divorce, 7:10-11  | 289 |
|                 | d. For Christians Married to Unbelievers: Stay Married, 7:12-16  | 294 |
| 2.              | <i>Exposition of the Principle of Remaining as You Were When Called (Illustrated by Circumcision and Slavery), 7:17-24</i> | 306 |
|                 | a. Analogy of Circumcision/Uncircumcision, 7:17-20   | 308 |
|                 | b. Analogy of Slavery/Freedom, 7:21-23   | 316 |
|                 | c. Enunciation of the Principle, 7:24  | 327 |
| 3.              | <i>Counsel for Single Adults, 7:25-38</i><br>Stay Unmarried:   | 328 |
|                 | a. Because of the "Present Crisis," 7:25-28  | 330 |
|                 | b. Because of the End of the World, 7:29-31  | 342 |
|                 | c. Because of the Distractions of Married Life, 7:32-35  | 349 |
|                 | d. With the Proviso of Freedom to Choose, 7:36-38  | 354 |
| 4.              | <i>Counsel for Wives and Widows, 7:39-40</i>   | 364 |
| IV.             | <b>"FLEE IDOLATRY" AND "GLORIFY GOD" IN YOUR WORSHIP, 8:1-14:40</b>  | 367 |
| A.              | <b>Condemnation of Idolatrous Practices: "Flee Idolatry" (Food Offered to Idols), 8:1-11:1</b>                             | 367 |
| 1.              | <i>Instructions concerning Subjective Idolatry and the Downfall of "the Weak" in Corinth, 8:1-13</i>                       | 371 |
|                 | a. Love Must Take Priority over Knowledge, 8:1-3   | 372 |
|                 | b. Christians (unlike Pagans) Acknowledge Only One God and One Lord, 8:4-6   | 379 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| c. Subjective Idolatry Is Still a Danger for Some Christians, 8:7-8   | 385 |
| d. The Corinthians Should Forego Their Rights to Avoid Destroying Other Believers, 8:9-13   | 390 |
| 2. <i>Exposition of Paul's Example: Waiving Rights for the Sake of the Gospel, 9:1-23</i>   | 395 |
| a. Paul Enjoys Elite Apostolic Status and Freedom, 9:1-2  | 397 |
| b. Paul Has a Right to Support, 9:3-14  | 400 |
| c. Paul Refuses to Exploit His Right to Support, 9:15-18  | 415 |
| d. Paul Refuses to Exploit His Apostolic Status and Freedom, 9:19-23  | 420 |
| 3. <i>Warning regarding Objective Idolatry and the Downfall of "the Knowledgeable" in Corinth, 9:24-11:1</i>                          | 433 |
| a. Athletes Who Lack Self-Restraint Do Not Receive the Prize, 9:24-27   | 435 |
| b. The History of Israel Shows That Those Who Lack Self-Restraint Are Condemned, 10:1-13  | 443 |
| c. Those Who Worship God Must Refrain from Any Association with Idolatry, 10:14-22  | 469 |
| d. Freedom Should Be Used for the Glory of God, 10:23-11:1  | 484 |
| B. Affirmation of Edifying Worship: "Glorify God" in Your Worship, 11:2-14:40   | 499 |
| 1. <i>Directions regarding the Proper Application of Traditions relating to Worship, 11:2-34</i>                                      | 503 |
| a. Men and Women Should Honor God and Others by Maintaining Proper Gender Distinctions in Worship, 11:2-16                            | 503 |
| i. <i>Introductory statement of commendation, 11:2</i>  | 505 |
| ii. <i>Statement of the basis for Christian practice, 11:3</i>  | 506 |
| iii. <i>Description of shameful behaviors, 11:4-6</i>   | 511 |
| iv. <i>Development of the basis for Christian practice, 11:7-12</i>   | 522 |
| v. <i>Appeals to common sense, nature, and consensus, 11:13-16</i>  | 537 |
| b. Wealthy Believers Should Honor the Lord and Their Poorer Brothers and Sisters in the Way They Practice the Lord's Supper, 11:17-34 | 541 |

| <i>Contents</i>  | xi  |
|--|-----|
| <i>i. Rebuke for abuses at the Lord's Supper, 11:17-22</i>   | 543 |
| <i>ii. Recitation and interpretation of the words of institution of the Lord's Supper, 11:23-26</i>  | 548 |
| <i>iii. Warnings and instructions to correct the abuses at the Lord's Supper, 11:27-34</i>   | 554 |
| 2. <i>Guidance in the Use of the Gifts of the Spirit in Worship, 12:1-14:40</i>  | 560 |
| a. <i>The Proper Worship of the One True God Is Governed by the Unity and Diversity Reflected in the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, 12:4-31</i>   | 560 |
| <i>i. Presentation of the christological criterion for discerning Spirit-led worship, 12:1-3</i>   | 561 |
| <i>ii. Exposition of the trinitarian basis for unity in light of the diversity of spiritual gifts, 12:4-7</i>  | 567 |
| <i>iii. Sample listing of some gifts of the Spirit, 12:8-11</i>  | 572 |
| <i>iv. Exposition and application of the church's identity as Christ's body, 12:12-31</i>  | 589 |
| b. <i>Love Is the Most Perfect and Only Eternal Way to Worship God, 13:1-13</i>  | 619 |
| <i>i. Encomium in praise of love's significance in comparison with other gifts of the Spirit, 13:1-3</i>   | 623 |
| <i>ii. Pointed description of some of love's key attributes, 13:4-7</i>  | 639 |
| <i>iii. Encomium in praise of love's endurance in comparison with other gifts of the Spirit, 13:8-13</i>   | 651 |
| c. <i>Prophecy Is to Be More Highly Valued than Tongues in Worship Due to Its Edifying Power, 14:1-33</i>  | 667 |
| <i>i. Introductory argument in favor of prophecy based on its edifying value, 14:1-5</i>   | 668 |
| <i>ii. Arguments based on analogies from music and language, 14:6-12</i>   | 677 |
| <i>iii. Elaboration of the application given in verse 12, 14:13-19</i>   | 687 |
| <i>iv. Argument in favor of the superiority of prophecy to tongues based on biblical background and effect on unbelievers, 14:20-25</i>  | 695 |
| <i>v. Specific directions regarding the practical application of Paul's teaching in worship gatherings (general application to the church: everyone ministers in an intelligible manner for edification of the church), 14:26-33</i> | 708 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <i>vi. Aside regarding the silence of women (another issue interfering with the fitting and orderly nature of the church's public worship), 14:34-35</i> | 718 |
| <i>vii. Rebuke of spiritual arrogance among some Corinthians and call for them to acknowledge the divine authority behind Paul's message, 14:36-37</i>   | 730 |
| <i>viii. Threat to those tempted to dismiss Paul's authority, 14:38</i>  | 734 |
| <i>ix. Summarizing conclusion of the subjects of prophecy and tongues, 14:39-40</i>  | 735 |
| V. THE RESURRECTION AND CONSUMMATION, 15:1-58  | 736 |
| A. Affirmation of the Central Role of the Resurrection of Christ in the Gospel Message, 15:1-11  | 742 |
| B. Explanation of the Consequences of Denying the Resurrection of the Dead, 15:12-19   | 753 |
| C. Explanation of the Significance of Christ's Resurrection, 15:20-28  | 760 |
| D. Exhortation in Light of Positive and Negative Responses to the Resurrection of the Dead, 15:29-34   | 779 |
| E. Answers to Philosophical Objections to Belief in the Resurrection of the Body, 15:35-49   | 798 |
| F. Explanation of the Necessity of the Resurrection for the Realization of God's Ultimate Victory, 15:50-57  | 826 |
| G. Final Appeal in Light of the Affirmation of the Resurrection, 15:58   | 837 |
| VI. LETTER CLOSING, 16:1-24  | 839 |
| A. Instructions for the Collection for the Saints, 16:1-4  | 840 |
| B. Travel Plans, 16:5-9  | 845 |
| C. Request on Behalf of Timothy, 16:10-11  | 850 |
| D. Update regarding Apollos, 16:12   | 853 |
| E. Exhortations, 16:13-14  | 854 |
| F. Commendation of Stephanas, 16:15-18   | 857 |
| G. Greetings from Others in Asia, 16:19-20   | 860 |
| H. Paul's Final Greeting and Farewell, 16:21-24  | 864 |

## *Introduction*

1 Corinthians has much to say to the modern world. No book in the New Testament, even Paul's letter to the Romans, does more to explain the grace of God, the lordship of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit. The contribution of the letter to the practical knowledge of God is immense. Not only is its ethics searching and rigorous, but its theology, especially of the cross, announces the end of the world as we know it. In addition to supplying concrete answers to many problems which have comparable manifestations today, on subjects as diverse as leadership, preaching, pluralism, sexuality, and worship, 1 Corinthians models how to approach the complexity of Christian living with the resources of the Old Testament and the example and teaching of Jesus. Above all, it shows the importance of asking, How does the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which envelop the letter in chapters 1 and 15, teach us to live?

Nonetheless, John Calvin was right to describe 1 Corinthians as "no less difficult than valuable."<sup>1</sup> It is, in fact, one of Paul's most difficult letters. Many factors weigh against a confident and appropriate reading of this ancient text. It is far removed from our world in terms of language, geography, economics, social customs, and religious practice. It talks with little or no explanation of human wisdom, law courts, prostitution, meat markets, and pagan worship, not to mention head coverings and baptism for the dead. It apparently treats an assortment of topics in no particular order. It carries forward a conversation, but what the other parties were saying is no longer available. To make matters worse, far from arriving at a consensus, modern biblical scholarship throws up rival interpretations of the letter, and an arsenal of critical methods each boasts of its superior potency.

To read the letter for all its worth we need to answer three questions, which in turn make up the main sections of the introduction to this com-

1. Calvin, 1. Cf. the translation by John Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981 rpt.), 29: "not less obscure than useful."

mentary: (1) What were Corinth and the church of God in Corinth like? (2) Who was Paul and what were his aims in writing to the Corinthians? And (3) how then should we read 1 Corinthians?

## I. THE CHURCH IN CORINTH

Virtually every modern commentary on 1 Corinthians agrees with James D. G. Dunn that “an ancient text like 1 Corinthians cannot be properly understood unless it is read against the background of its historical context and as part of a dialogue with the Corinthian church itself.”<sup>2</sup> The following two sections address the nature of ancient Corinth and the character of its troubled church. Neither treatment aims to be exhaustive. The commentary is the best place to discuss the myriad of details involved in these issues in direct contact with relevant texts in the letter. The aim here is briefly to set the general parameters within which reliable and helpful answers may be constructed in the course of the commentary.

### A. Roman Corinth

At the foot of the impressive Acrocorinth, a rugged limestone summit (1,886 feet/574 meters high), Greek Corinth had existed for some several hundred years before it was destroyed by Rome in 146 B.C. The city was re-founded by Julius Caesar in 44 B.C. and quickly rose to prominence again, becoming one of the most important cities of the Roman Empire. Corinth was the capital of the province of Achaia and the seat of the governor. The ancient geographer Strabo attributed the city’s economic success to its strategic location.<sup>3</sup> It was situated on a narrow neck of land that connected the Peloponnese to the south with the rest of Greece to the north. To the east and west respectively were the Saronic and Corinthian gulfs of the Aegean and Ionian seas, the distance between the two bodies of water being only nine kilometers, or less than six miles. A paved road, the *diolkos*, enabled boats to be dragged this short distance in order to avoid making the treacherous sea voyage around Cape Malea at the tip of the Peloponnese. A number of leaders, as far back as Periander in 602 B.C., proposed the digging of a canal across the Isthmus. Finally, in 1923 the project came to fruition, and it is used by shipping to this day.

Archaeological excavations of ancient Corinth began in the nineteenth century, with the first report published in 1886. With information

2. James D. G. Dunn, “Reconstructions of Corinthian Christianity and the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians,” in *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church* (ed. David G. Horrell and Edward Adams; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 308-9.

3. Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.19-20a.

drawn from archaeological, epigraphic, numismatic, and ancient literary sources scholars have assembled a remarkably sharp profile of the city in Paul's day.<sup>4</sup>

Roman Corinth was prosperous, cosmopolitan, and religiously pluralistic, accustomed to visits by impressive, traveling public speakers and obsessed with status, self-promotion, and personal rights. From a Jewish or Christian viewpoint, as with any pagan city, its inhabitants were marked by the worship of idols, sexual immorality, and greed. Other historical information of interest about the city includes Roman law, culture, and religion, a Jewish presence, Paul's labors as a tentmaker, the nearby bi-annual Isthmian games (second only to the Olympic games), Corinth's social makeup, its social, political, and economic culture, and so on. An understanding of these and many other characteristics of the city will prove invaluable in the course of understanding the letter. This material is reviewed at appropriate points in the commentary.

## **B. The Church "Belonging to God"**

Paul laid the foundation for "the church of God in Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2) on his second missionary journey and spent eighteen months there building it up (Acts 18:1-18). Most of its members were former Gentiles (cf. 1 Cor. 12:2: "when you were pagans . . .") and had turned to God from idols. Sent from Ephesus (see 1 Cor. 16:8) on his third missionary journey a few years later, in the spring of 54 or 55 A.D.,<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians mentions a previous letter (1 Cor. 5:9-11) of Paul to the Corinthians. In it he had warned them not to associate with those who were guilty of serious sins, such as sexual immorality, greed, and idolatry. Since these were the typical faults of the Gentiles, Paul was effectively exhorting them not to be "conformed to the world" (Rom. 12:2). Unfortunately, some in the church mistook Paul to be saying they should shun not just fellow believers who behaved in such ways, but their non-Christian neighbors as well. What we call 1 Corinthians is in part Paul's attempt to correct this misunderstanding and provide clearer guidance regarding problems the church was facing due to sexual immorality, greed and idolatry.

Paul was prompted to write 1 Corinthians in response to disturbing news from the church. This included both oral reports, from Chloe's people (1:11) and Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (16:17), and a letter from the church that Paul mentions in 7:1 consisting of a series of questions

4. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor's 1983 *St. Paul's Corinth* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press) was an early example, now in its third edition, with other studies continuing into the present. Later in this introduction we point to the place of such work in the study of the letter (III.D.2. — "Greco-Roman Foreground").

5. On dating the letter, which revolves largely around the date of Gallio, the proconsul of Asia (cf. Acts 18:12), see Thiselton, 29-32.

posed by the congregation. As far as we can reconstruct the situation, after Paul left Corinth, Apollos, and possibly Peter, visited, and this caused unintended problems as well as bringing various benefits. The congregation was now divided based on loyalty to their favorite Christian leader (1:12). Further, Paul learned that they were in considerable disarray, with some members engaging each other in civil litigation (6:1-11), cases of sexual immorality (5:1-13; 6:12-20), marriage problems (7:1-40), and questions concerning food offered to idols (chs. 8-10) and spiritual gifts (chs. 12-14).

The precise cause and nature of the problems in the church in Corinth have been matters of intense dispute in New Testament scholarship for half a century. Numerous religious and philosophical parallels with the putative behavior and beliefs of the church there (inferred from a mirror reading of 1 and 2 Corinthians) have been adduced, including material from Gnosticism, Hellenistic Judaism, Stoicism, Cynicism, and Epicureanism.<sup>6</sup> Some have attributed the problems in Corinth to a misunderstanding of one aspect of Paul's own theology, resulting in a so-called "over-realized eschatology."<sup>7</sup> However, in recent years a rough consensus has begun to emerge in which scholars agree that the problems Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians reflect the infiltration of Corinthian social values into the church.

Hans Conzelmann's question in 1969 was on target: "We have here to do with people [the Corinthians] who have only recently become Christians; what were the ideas they brought with them into the community?"<sup>8</sup> Many of their faults can be traced to their uncritical acceptance of the attitudes, values, and behaviors of the society in which they lived. The glorification of wisdom, the eating of food sacrificed to idols, the denial of bodily resurrection, and the light assessment of sexual immorality, drunkenness, greed, and vexatious litigation were all common features of their society. A sample of commentators who concur with this basic conclusion includes:

- Bruce W. Winter: "[T]he problems which arose subsequent to Paul's departure [from Corinth] did so partly because the Christians were 'cosmopolitans', i.e., citizens of this world and, in particular, citizens or residents of Roman Corinth," and thus "the primary influences on the responses of the Christians were derived principally from *Romanitas*."<sup>9</sup>
- Richard B. Hays: "they [the Corinthian Christians] are uncritically

6. For a survey see David G. Horrell and Edward Adams (eds.), *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 16-23.

7. See Anthony C. Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology at Corinth," *NTS* 24 (1977-78), 510-26 and Fee, 12 and passim. According to this view, the Corinthians' problems stemmed from thinking that they were already experiencing all that Christ had won for them through the resurrection. See our comments on 1 Cor. 4:8 for an evaluation.

8. Conzelmann, 15.

9. B. W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 27-28.

perpetuating the norms and values of the pagan culture around them."<sup>10</sup>

- Wolfgang Schrage, in discussing the various influences on the Corinthians, concludes that "after their conversion they [the Corinthian Christians] remained in contact with their heathen environment, by way of mixed marriages (7:12-16), in the workplace (cf. 4:12), at the marketplace (10:25), through invitations (cf. 10:27) and elsewhere, and were influenced in these settings socially, religiously, ideologically, and in other ways."<sup>11</sup>
- Anthony Thiselton makes much of "the impact of the culture of Corinth upon the developing faith of newly converted believers."<sup>12</sup>
- R. B. Terry argues that "most, if not all, of the problems which Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians can be attributed to the influence of the Corinthian cultural setting on the Christians there."<sup>13</sup>
- David E. Garland rejects other suggested influences, arguing that "the influences on them [the Corinthian believers] were more amorphous and their behavior was swayed by culturally ingrained habits from their pagan past and by values instilled by a popularized secular ethics."<sup>14</sup>

Lyle D. Vander Broek offers a pithy summary: "Each of the community problems Paul needed to address grew out of the Corinthians' inability to let the gospel message fully reshape their gentile, Greco-Roman lives, whether because they misunderstood that message or because they rejected it outright. They were Hellenists through and through, and this eschatological, cross-centered, body-affirming Jewish sect called Christianity demanded that they enter another theological and ethical world. It is no surprise that these residents of Corinth would seek rhetorical wisdom, be unconcerned with immorality and the preservation of the body, be infatuated with asceticism and spiritual empowerment, and preserve the distinctions between rich and poor. The Corinthians were simply trying to be Christians with a minimal amount of social and theological disturbance."<sup>15</sup>

While other scholars have recognized that the Corinthian problems are mainly due to the influence of dominant Roman/Corinthian culture and values (rather than overrealized eschatology, Gnosticism, or some other exotic influence), we maintain that view more consistently. This is especially apparent in our interpretation of chapter 7, where other scholars

10. Hays, 71.

11. Schrage, 1:42. The translation is our own.

12. Thiselton, xviii.

13. R. B. Terry, *A Discourse Analysis of First Corinthians* (Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1995), 57.

14. Garland, 13.

15. Lyle D. Vander Broek, *Breaking Barriers: The Possibilities of Christian Community in a Lonely World* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002), 27-28.

continue to suggest that some Corinthians were advocating celibacy both outside and within marriage. That would be a rather exotic position, not in keeping with the dominant Greco-Roman culture. Our own view understands the text in light of more dominant views of sex in the Roman world (which tended to be divided over whether sex was to be engaged in for pleasure or only for procreation, and, if both, if sex for pleasure should be sought outside the marital relationship). Our interpretation assumes that here also the problem the Corinthians are dealing with is a reflection of dominant perspectives in the Roman and Corinthian context. In short, the Corinthians were “worldly,” “acting like mere human beings” (1 Cor. 3:3). In this sense the letter is a timeless challenge to Christians of all generations and in all places not to be conformed to the world (Rom. 12:2).

The main problem for the Corinthian Christians is actually signaled in the opening verses of Paul’s letter. He writes in 1 Corinthians 1:2 to “the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified, called to be holy.” That the church in Corinth is God’s church is repeated three times. Yet the Corinthians were still behaving as if they belonged to their city! Paul’s aim in writing is to urge them to adopt a way of life more in accord with their true ownership.

## II. THE IDENTITY AND AIMS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

When one is reading other people’s mail, it is helpful to know something not only about the recipients, but also about the author. Knowing his or her background and experience of life helps in the task of listening in to their correspondence. 1 Corinthians is a case in point. Knowing Paul facilitates a more accurate and satisfying reading of the letter.

Paul’s story is well known. By trade he was a “tentmaker”<sup>16</sup> (Acts 18:3). At an early age he was sent to Jerusalem to study for the purpose of becoming a Pharisaic teacher. Brought up a Hebrew of Hebrews and a Pharisee, he violently persecuted the early church and was turned about on the road to Damascus by a blinding vision of the risen Jesus in about A.D. 34 (Acts 9:1-19; 22:3-21; 26:4-18; Gal. 1:13-16). In Damascus he regained his sight and was baptized (Acts 9:3-19). Immediately he began to preach Jesus as messiah in the synagogues. Ironically, the persecutor then became the object of persecution (Acts 9:19-25; cf. 1 Thess. 2:14-16).

As a Jew who became the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul stood between the Jewish and pagan worlds. There is good evidence that Paul was ideally suited to take the message of the long-awaited Jewish Messiah to both Jews and Gentiles across the Roman Empire in that he was well acquainted with both cultural contexts. His aims and agenda in writing 1 Corinthians are

16. Gk. σκηνοποιός.

best understood in relation to the various facets of his identity. The significance of Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles can be fully grasped only when four other descriptions are taken into account: Paul the Jew, the Roman citizen, the follower of Jesus, and the eschatological herald.

### **A. Paul the Jew**

Paul was a Jew (Gal. 1:13-14; Phil. 3:4-6; 2 Cor. 11:22) from the tribe of Benjamin who was born a Roman citizen in Tarsus of Cilicia, a prosperous and cultured city and a center of Hellenistic culture. Paul was probably his Roman name, Saul being his Hebrew name.

What was Paul's place in Judaism? Rather than needing to limit Paul's background to one corner or another of first-century Judaism, we have good reasons to believe that his exposure was broad indeed. The information about his pre-Christian career in Acts connects him with both Jerusalem and the Diaspora. According to the sole surviving witness to Paul's education, Acts 22:3, Paul was educated at the feet of the honored rabbi Gamaliel (possibly the grandson of Hillel). Though trained in Palestine, he maintained a living connection with Tarsus, his hometown (see Acts 9:30; 11:25), wrote his letters in Greek, and used the Greek Bible. Indeed, in Acts 21:37-40, Paul is depicted as able to speak both Greek and Aramaic. These indications of double linguistic and geographical spread are closely paralleled by what we know of the Jewish historian Josephus, who, although born in Jerusalem, later lived in the Diaspora and composed his writings in both Greek and Aramaic (see the opening of *The Jewish War*). Paul's standard greeting to the churches to which he writes, "grace and peace" (see 1 Cor. 1:3a), illustrates this combination of Greek and Hebrew influences; the phrase, as Zerwick and Grosvenor note, "combines and Christianizes" the traditional Greek and Hebrew greetings.<sup>17</sup>

The fact that Paul is "Jewish to the roots"<sup>18</sup> should alert us to the importance of the Jewish Scriptures, the Old Testament, for understanding his letters, among which 1 Corinthians is a prime example. The normal first-century Jewish experience included considerable instruction in the Scriptures in the context of both home and synagogue (cf. Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.178, 204). Philo wrote that the Jews "consider their laws to be divine revelation and are instructed in them from their youth" (*Embassy to Gaius* 210; cf. 115). According to *m. 'Abot* 5:21, "at five years old one is fit for the Scripture." 4 Maccabees 18:10 intimates that the model Jewish father gave much instruction in the Scriptures to his sons. The educational character of the synagogue service is stressed by Josephus (*Against Apion* 2.175): Jews "gather together to

17. Max Zerwick and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974-79), 458.

18. Morna D. Hooker, "Paul — Apostle to the Gentiles," *Epworth Review* 18.2 (1991), 85.

listen to the law and learn it accurately." Paul confesses on no fewer than five occasions in 1 Corinthians that the Scriptures are critical for understanding the source of his teaching: 4:6; 9:10; 10:6, 11; 14:34. According to Paul, the Scriptures were "written for our instruction" (10:11; cf. Rom. 15:4).

That the audience of 1 Corinthians was familiar with the synagogue culture and that the Scriptures formed a large part of Paul's face-to-face instruction in Corinth are suggested by Acts 18, where the synagogue ruler and "his entire household believed in the Lord," and are confirmed by a variety of indications in the letter. 1 Corinthians assumes a good deal of Old Testament knowledge, which Paul presumably imparted to the Corinthian believers in person. For example, understanding 5:6-8 requires some knowledge of the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread, comprehending 15:20 requires a familiarity with the concept of "firstfruits" (Exod. 23:16, 19a; Lev. 23:10-14; Num. 18:8-13; Deut. 18:4; 26:2, 10; 2 Chr. 31:5; Neh. 10:37), and an acquaintance with Jewish apocalyptic/wisdom traditions is necessary to grasp properly some terms in 2:6-9. Furthermore, 16:2 mentions the Sabbath and 16:8 Pentecost, both without explanation. It appears that Paul assumed that his readers shared his culture and so recognized something of the Jewish nature of his teaching and its biblical background. It is worth remembering that Gentile adherence to Judaism in the first century was reasonably widespread, the "god-fearers" phenomenon probably being only the tip of the iceberg.<sup>19</sup>

## B. Paul the Roman Citizen

That Paul was familiar with the larger world of Greco-Roman culture is given striking testimony in 1 Corinthians 15:33, where he alludes to the Greek poet Menander. We should take Paul's Roman citizenship no less seriously than his Jewish identity when reading his letters. To have been born a Roman citizen was an exceptional distinction. On all his journeys throughout the Roman Empire Paul enjoyed the attendant rights and privileges of such a station, including fair public trial and exemption from some forms of punishment (cf. Acts 16:37; 22:26-29; 25:10-12). Paul was also a citizen of Tarsus in Cilicia, which was "no mean city" (Acts 21:37-39). Tarsus was indeed "a major Hellenistic city famed for its high culture."<sup>20</sup> Both Acts and Paul's own letters indicate that he had a broader exposure to different parts of the Roman Empire than most of its citizens, since he traveled back and forth between Jerusalem and Greece (passing through Syria, Cilicia, Galatia, etc.) and had lived for extended periods in Tarsus, Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, and Ephesus. The conversational style of some of his let-

19. Cf. Acts 15:21.

20. Martin Hengel, *The Pre-Christian Paul* (London: SCM, 1991), 1. For a thorough and convincing defense of the veracity of Paul's claims to being a citizen of Rome and Tarsus, see Hengel, *The Pre-Christian Paul*, 4-15.

ters, especially Romans and 1 Corinthians 9, has often been compared to the Cynic-Stoic mode of argumentation known as *diatribe*. He alludes to Greek games (1 Cor. 9:24-27) and Hellenistic slave trade (1 Cor. 7:22) and employs Hellenistic vocabulary such as “conscience” and “freedom.”<sup>21</sup> No doubt he had intimate knowledge of the institutions and ideas of the predominantly Gentile world into which he sent this letter.

### C. Paul the Follower of Jesus

To understand the author of 1 Corinthians it is not sufficient to consider Paul’s fine Jewish pedigree and his wide experience of the world in his day. Above and beyond being a Jew and a Roman citizen, Paul was a Christian, a follower of Jesus, with extensive knowledge of the life and teaching of Jesus. He learned about Jesus from Hellenistic Christians like Stephen, whom he opposed so vehemently at first (Acts 6:9; 8:1, 3; 9:29), and through contact with believers in Damascus (including Ananias; Acts 9:10-23) and in Jerusalem (including Peter; Gal. 1:18). That Paul consciously drew on Jesus’ teaching as he instructed the early churches and wrote his letters is clear from 1 Corinthians 7:10-11; 9:14; 11:23 (and from 1 Thess. 4:15 and Rom. 14:14). Paul’s commitment to Christ is reflected in the catalogs listing the things he had willingly suffered on his behalf in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13; 15:30-32 (cf. Gal. 6:17; 2 Cor. 11:23-29; 12:10). As Christ’s own ministry focused on his crucifixion and resurrection (Mark 8:31-33; 9:31; 10:32-34; Matt. 16:21-23; 17:22-23; 20:17-19 Luke 9:22; 18:31-33), so also Paul’s message focuses on the cross and resurrection, which serve as a frame for this letter (1:17-2:4; ch. 15).

### D. Paul the Eschatological Herald

Paul’s allegiance to Jesus, however, was not simply a matter of following a powerful religious figure or persuasive Jewish prophet. When he says in 1 Corinthians 1:17, “Christ sent me . . . to *preach the gospel*,” he is indebted in his choice of words to Isaiah 40:9, 52:7, and 61:1, where, as Dickson points out, “‘secular’ messenger language had been transposed to a higher, eschatological level, depicting the end-time herald(s) commissioned by Israel’s God to announce his salvific reign.”<sup>22</sup> Paul’s gospel heralding is an eschato-

21. See further Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Paul and His Theology: A Brief Sketch* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1989), 29-30. Cf. Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 68: “There can no longer be any doubt that Paul was thoroughly familiar with the teaching, methods of operation and style of argumentation of the philosophers of the period.”

22. John P. Dickson, *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities: The Shape, Extent and Background of Early Christian Mission* (WUNT 2.159; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 176.

logical, divinely commissioned activity.<sup>23</sup> Although Paul the eschatological herald is less well known than other ways of describing his identity, it turns out to be a key ingredient in understanding his agenda and is worth exploring at length.

For Paul, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus were the decisive events in the history of Israel and even the world. Galatians, for example, “reflects a salvation-historical perspective in which the coming of Christ is seen to be the climactic fulfillment towards which the whole history of Israel has been leading.”<sup>24</sup> The promises to the Jewish forefather Abraham (Gal. 3:7-8, 16-17, 29; 4:22-23), the giving of the law (Gal. 3:17, 19; 4:24-25), the execution of the curse of the law in Israel’s exile (Gal. 3:10, 13; 4:24-25), and the prophetic promise regarding the future salvation and restoration of God’s people (Gal. 1:6-9) are all parts of a unified historical drama which climaxes in the coming of Jesus, his death for sins, and his resurrection from the dead. Yet Paul does not regard this “fulfillment” simply as the inevitable outworking of secular historical processes in Israel’s history; it is, rather, an “apocalyptic” fulfillment, “the dramatic and climactic inbreaking of the eschatological age of salvation.”<sup>25</sup> In Jesus Christ, God has pierced the barrier between the divine and human (Gal. 1:12), heaven and earth (Gal. 4:25-26), Spirit and flesh (Gal. 5:16-17), new and old creation (Gal. 6:15). A new age has dawned in which God the Father deals with humanity as sons, not slaves (Gal. 4:3-5); where humans relate to God not by law, but by faith working through love (Gal. 3:23, 25; 5:6).

The salvation-historical and apocalyptic perspectives are not, for Paul, two irreconcilable outlooks standing in unresolved tension. Instead, the two perspectives converge in Paul’s thought such that he regards the history of the particular nation of Israel as finding its fulfillment, through Jesus Christ, in salvation for the entire world. The convergence of salvation-historical and apocalyptic motifs is nowhere more apparent than in the two “bookends” to Romans: 1:1-5 and 16:25-27. The gospel of Jesus Christ, descended from David according to the flesh yet declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, has cosmic significance. This “mystery” was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and *through the prophetic writings* (i.e., the historical Scriptures of Israel) has been made known to all nations, and must be proclaimed to the world and its authorities. It is the eschatological “power of God for salvation” (Rom. 1:16). Paul the Jew regards himself as a herald who has been commissioned by Jesus to perform this task. Paul has been sent, through a special revelation of God’s Son, to preach Christ to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:11, 16). He is one of two “point men” in God’s eschatologi-

23. Peter Stuhlmacher, “The Pauline Gospel,” in *The Gospel and the Gospels* (ed. Peter Stuhlmacher; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 156-65.

24. Roy E. Ciampa, “Galatians,” in *NDBT* 311.

25. Ciampa, “Galatians,” in *NDBT* 311.

cal mission, having been entrusted with the gospel to the Gentiles just as Peter was entrusted with the gospel to the Jews (Gal. 2:7).

Paul's role as eschatological herald is tightly bound up with the message he proclaims. Scott Hafemann has drawn attention to the role of Paul's suffering in his mission.<sup>26</sup> Hafemann argues compellingly that Paul's weakness was the *ground* and *cause* of his preaching (Gal. 4:13), not merely the circumstances.<sup>27</sup> Paul's personal appeal in Galatians 4:12-20 ties his suffering and his message together — Paul, in his suffering, was accepted *as Christ Jesus* and so should continue to be accepted (Gal. 4:14-16).<sup>28</sup> Both Christ and Paul suffer for the sake of others — Christ as an atoning sacrifice (Gal. 3:10-13), Paul as the messenger of God (Gal. 4:14; cf. v. 19). The “thesis-like affirmations” of 1 Cor. 4:9, 2 Cor. 4:11, and 2 Cor. 2:14 clearly express Paul's portrayal of “his apostolic suffering as the revelatory vehicle through which the knowledge of God as made manifest in the cross of Christ and in the power of the Spirit is being disclosed.”<sup>29</sup> Paul's suffering is no accident: it is the appropriate vehicle for proclaiming the message of Christ crucified (1 Cor. 4:9). This, of course, makes sense only when one realizes that suffering is the very means by which God has brought about his eschatological glory, primarily for Christ (Phil. 2:6-11) and consequently for Christ's apostle (2 Cor. 2:14-16) and his people (e.g., Gal. 4:12).<sup>30</sup> This pattern is reflected in various ways throughout Paul's letters (e.g., 2 Cor. 1:5-7; 1 Thess. 3:4; Phil. 1:29-30; Eph. 3:13; Col. 1:24-29; 2 Tim. 1:11-12; 2:8-10).

This same pattern is evident in the description of Paul's suffering in the book of Acts. In Acts, the Lord himself announces that Paul is “a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” by way of great suffering (Acts 9:15-16; cf. Isa. 49:7), proclaiming that “I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47; cf. Isa. 49:6). The role of Paul as the eschatological herald of God's apocalyptic power overcoming the powers of this present evil age may explain the presence of “kings” in the list of the three groups who will be presented with God's glorious name, alongside the Gentiles and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15). Furthermore, it may explain the disproportionately large amount of space in Acts given over to descriptions of Paul's preaching on trial before human authorities. In Acts 20–28, Paul appears to be reliving the Lucan account of Jesus' passion. Both set out resolutely for Jerusalem (Luke 9:51, Acts 19:21), send disciples ahead (Luke 9:52, Acts 19:22), predict their suffering (Luke 9:22, Acts 20:22-24), prepare their followers for their “departure” (Luke 21:5-36, Acts

26. Scott Hafemann, “The Role of Suffering in the Mission of Paul,” in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles* (ed. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein; WUNT 127; Tübingen: Mohr, 2000), 165-84.

27. Hafemann, “The Role of Suffering in the Mission of Paul,” 169-74.

28. Hafemann, “The Role of Suffering in the Mission of Paul,” 174.

29. Hafemann, “The Role of Suffering in the Mission of Paul,” 174.

30. Hafemann, “The Role of Suffering in the Mission of Paul,” 177-78.

20:13-38), come in front of the crowds in Jerusalem (Luke 22:47-23:25, Acts 21:27-22:29), are accused of leading a rebellion (Luke 22:52, Acts 21:38), are seized by the crowd (Luke 22:54, Acts 21:30), are flogged (Luke 22:63, Acts 22:24), and are falsely accused (Luke 23:2, Acts 21:28). In both cases, Jews stir the crowds (Luke 23:5, Acts 21:28), there is mob rule (Luke 23:18, Acts 22:22), they shout for the accused to die (Luke 23:20, Acts 22:22), and the secular ruler is powerless (Luke 23:24, Acts 22:29). There are trials before the Sanhedrin (Luke 22:66-71, Acts 22:30-23:11), the governor (Luke 23:1-7, Acts 24:1-25:12), and the king (Luke 23:8-12, Acts 25:13-26:32). However, there are also important differences between the two accounts. Jesus, when face to face with earthly rulers, says nothing to defend himself and so goes to his sacrificial death (Luke 22:66-71; 23:3). Paul, however, takes the opportunity afforded by his arrest and trial to defend himself at great length against charges of Jewish apostasy and Roman insurrection (e.g., Acts 25:8; 28:17-18). The real issue, however, is the resurrection of Christ (23:6; 24:15; 24:21), and in his trials Paul soundly proclaims Jesus' resurrection and its corollaries to the worldly rulers — the Roman governors (24:24), the king (Acts 26:27), and indeed all the leaders of the city (25:23). Furthermore, in line with God's promise in 23:11, Paul goes to Rome and has the opportunity to testify before Caesar himself. In this way, Acts paints Paul as the Lord's Isaianic Servant, who, through suffering, trials, and rejection by his own people, testifies to the name of the Lord and his Christ before "kings" (Isa. 49:7). Paul in his own person takes on the prophetic role of Israel — he is the light to the nations, the bringer of salvation.

Paul's task of proclamation, therefore, is not the mere rehearsal of past facts. God is bringing to pass, through Paul, the eschatological fulfillment of salvation history. Just as the new eschatological age has already dawned with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, so it is currently breaking in to the old age through the preaching of Jesus Christ. Paul's message is not idle chatter or some good ideas; it is apocalyptic power (1 Cor. 4:20). As Paul proclaims and lives out "Christ crucified," all the structures of human existence are transformed, human pride is judged, and salvation comes to those who believe (1 Cor. 1:17-25; cf. 1 Thess. 1:5). Paul's gospel brings the obedience of faith for the sake of Jesus Christ among the nations (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). So Paul sees himself as not only proclaiming, but also actively bringing about, the new age of God's direct rule over the cosmos in both judgment and salvation. It is accomplished "by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God" (Rom. 15:19).<sup>31</sup> Similar themes emerge in 1 Corinthians 2:6-11, which draws on apocalyptic motifs in Daniel (see esp. Dan. 2:19-23 LXX).<sup>32</sup>

31. P. T. O'Brien, *Consumed by Passion: Paul and the Dynamic of the Gospel* (Homebush West, Australia: Lancer, 1993), 35-36.

32. H. H. Drake Williams, *The Wisdom of the Wise: The Presence and Function of Scripture within 1 Cor. 1:18-3:23* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 157-208.

## E. Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles

What is the overall goal of Paul's apostolic activity? Paul sees the final end of the mighty salvation-historical drama in which he is caught up to be *the glory of God*. While much modern biblical scholarship has marginalized both salvation history and the concept of God's glory in Paul's thought, it is clear that both themes are frequently present and often linked.<sup>33</sup> Paul ascribes glory to God for his gracious election and blessing of certain people and family groups in the history of Israel, for his bestowal upon the covenant people of Israel of certain key redemptive advantages (Rom. 3:2; 9:3-5; cf. Eph. 2:12), for his revelation of truth through Israel's Scriptures (2 Cor. 1:20; Rom. 11:33-36), and for his grace extended even to Paul and to Gentile Christians (Rom. 15:7; Gal. 1:3-5, 24). This emphasis on the glory of God is also not merely a quirk of Paul's personality; on the contrary, he is appropriating a theme that, in the Old Testament Scriptures, is ubiquitous, tied firmly to historical events, and theologically rich.<sup>34</sup> The glory of God is also of fundamental importance for Paul's mission in relation to the Gentiles.

Steven C. Hawthorne points out that the concepts of glory, God's name, and worship are closely tied together in the Scriptures.<sup>35</sup> "To glorify someone is to recognize their intrinsic worth and beauty, and to speak of that feature in a public way. To glorify God is to praise or to speak of Him openly and truthfully."<sup>36</sup> God is glorified as his name, or worthy reputation based on his great deeds, is proclaimed throughout the world (e.g., Ps. 96:2-4), and consequently recognized by all people (Ps. 96:7-9). This recognition of the greatness of God's name in both word and deed is true *worship*. Such worship is the goal of salvation (Exod. 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3). It is not only a recognition of God's supremacy, but a heartfelt response of love to the God who has acted in love to save a people for himself (cf. Rev. 5:1-14). As people worship God, proclaiming the glory of his name, so they are brought into the highest honor by God and glorified, for worship is the fulfillment of God's love: "God *reveals* his glory to all peoples so that he may *receive* glory from all creation."<sup>37</sup> This is a key theme in the scriptural account of God's dealings with humanity, from Abraham through to Christ (e.g., Num. 14:17-21).

The establishment of God's glory necessarily involves the removal of all false worship. The salvation of the Exodus required judgment against the false gods of Egypt (Exod. 12:12). The taking of the Promised Land required

33. Robert W. Yarbrough, "Paul and Salvation History," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2, *The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck and Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 297-342 (here 322-39).

34. Yarbrough, "Paul and Salvation History," 336-39.

35. Steven C. Hawthorne, "The Story of His Glory," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 34-48.

36. Hawthorne, "The Story of His Glory," 34-35.

37. Hawthorne, "The Story of His Glory," 37.

demolition of the false idolatrous worship taking place in Canaan (Deut. 4:15-24; Josh. 23:7). A specially chosen place set apart for the worship of God's glory and name is required because of the existence of other shrines dedicated to the worship of false deities by the nations (Deut. 12:2-14). The temple, therefore, stands as the place where all the nations are beckoned to come alongside Israel and worship God (1 Chr. 16:23-33; cf. Ps. 96) — abandoning their own idolatrous practices. Yet paradoxically, the history of Israel herself is "a prolonged up-and-down struggle with idolatry."<sup>38</sup> The exile, along with the destruction of the temple, was the appalling conclusion to this struggle. Yet it was not simply a blow for the nation of Israel; more significantly, it was a terrible indictment of God's name and glory (Dan. 9:15-19; Ezek. 36:22-23). Nevertheless, the prophets and psalmists continued to speak of "the history and the destiny of Israel in terms of the nations being drawn to God by name, and worshiping Him with diverse, lavish glory" (Pss. 66:1-4; 138:4-5; Hab. 2:14; Zeph. 3:9-10; Mal. 1:11).<sup>39</sup>

In connection with Paul's appropriation of this theme, Richard B. Hays observes that "Isaiah offers the clearest expression in the Old Testament of a universalistic, eschatological vision in which the restoration of Israel in Zion is accompanied by an ingathering of Gentiles to worship the Lord; that is why the book is both statistically and substantively the most important scriptural source for Paul."<sup>40</sup> The extensive use of Isaiah in 1 Corinthians is widely recognized (see further below, Section III.C.1., "Two Key Old Testament Texts, [b]. Isaiah"). A striking and significant vision of the eschatological glory of God appears in the final verses of Isaiah (66:18-24):

18" And I, because of what they have planned and done, am about to come and gather the people of all nations and languages, and they will come and see my glory. 19 I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations — to Tarshish, to the Libyans and Lydians (famous as archers), to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations. 20 And they will bring all your people, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the LORD — on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels," says the LORD. "They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the LORD in ceremonially clean vessels. 21 And I will select some of them also to be priests and Levites," says the LORD.

22" As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure be-

38. Hawthorne, "The Story of His Glory," 42.

39. Hawthorne, "The Story of His Glory," 43.

40. Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 162, cited in James M. Scott, *Paul and the Nations: The Old Testament and Jewish Background of Paul's Mission to the Nations with Special Reference to the Destination of Galatians* (WUNT 84; Tübingen: Mohr, 1995), 146-47.

fore me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure. <sup>23</sup>From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all people will come and bow down before me," says the LORD.

<sup>24</sup>"And they will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to the whole human race."

Here, God's ultimate glory is described in terms of the involvement of the Gentiles in temple worship. There is both an "outward" and an "inward" dynamic to God's glorification: God's glory will be declared to the nations by missionaries (v. 19), and the nations will come and glorify God in temple worship (vv. 18, 23). The eschatological remnant will act as priests in God's temple in Jerusalem (v. 20), bringing those scattered among the nations as an offering to the Lord.

The geographical references to the nations in Isaiah 66:19 are of particular interest. James M. Scott has argued that the Table of Nations of Genesis 10 (cf. 1 Chr. 1:1–2:2) represents an ethnographic and geographic tradition that pervades the Old Testament and Jewish tradition.<sup>41</sup> It is a verbal "map"; a detailed geographical worldview that effectively places Israel in the center of the world (cf. Ezek. 5:5, chs. 38–39).<sup>42</sup> This "map" is also applicable to Old Testament eschatology. Isaiah 66:18–20, in many of its details, reflects the Table of Nations tradition as it announces a positive eschatological expectation for the nations.<sup>43</sup> In Isaiah 66:19, each of the three sons of Noah is represented: Shem (Lydians), Ham (Libyans), and Japheth (Tarsish, Tubal, Greece). The focus of the eschatological expectation is, of course, Jerusalem, situated in the center of the world.

According to Scott, the Table of Nations is at the forefront of Paul's mind when he describes his own eschatological mission to the nations in geographical terms (Rom 15:19).<sup>44</sup> Paul has "fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ . . . from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum." That is, Paul's mission to the nations is viewed from the perspective of Jerusalem as the center of a circle embracing the whole inhabited world (cf. Ezek. 5:5). Riesner makes the connection with Isaiah 66:18–21 even more explicit.<sup>45</sup> For Riesner, "Paul read this text as being fulfilled in his own activity, and traces of this exegesis stand behind Rom. 15:16–24."<sup>46</sup> The striking use of cultic

41. Scott, *Paul and the Nations*, 5–56.

42. Scott, *Paul and the Nations*, 5–10.

43. Scott, *Paul and the Nations*, 13–14.

44. Scott, *Paul and the Nations*, 135–49.

45. Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (trans. Doug Stott from the German *Die Frühzeit des Apostels Paulus*; Tübingen, Mohr, 1994; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 245–53. Scott, *Paul and the Nations*, 145–47, criticizes Riesner for relying too much on this one text. Scott claims that Paul has in mind the whole Table of Nations tradition, which in turn informs the Isaiah text. But Riesner has found numerous parallels with Isa. 66:18–21 in Rom. 15:16–28, beyond the geographical references of v. 19.

46. Riesner, *Paul's Early Period*, 246.

terminology in Romans 15:16 to describe Gentile evangelization suggests an Old Testament background. Isaiah 66:18-21, with its unique juxtaposition of Gentile mission and temple-related descriptions of Gentile worship, is the strongest contender. Riesner presents an impressive array of further parallels between these two passages.<sup>47</sup> For Paul, the nature of the eschatological temple and the glory that God is to receive through worldwide worship are understood in the light of the kingdom God has established through his Son, the universal Lord.

Paul's aim, then, is to bring about true worship and obedience among the Gentiles, to the glory of God (cf. Rom. 12:1-2; Acts 18:13). How did Paul envisage this happening? An examination of certain key texts shows that he followed a fairly consistent pattern. His expositions of the dynamics of pagan sin, the nature of Gentile conversion, and his own missionary agenda are consonant with the themes and structure of 1 Corinthians, as we shall see below.

### 1. *The Dynamics of Pagan Sin — Romans 1*

According to Romans 1:21-28, the typical Gentile vices of idolatry and sexual immorality are rooted in the futility of Gentile thinking and the senselessness of Gentile hearts (v. 21): "Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools" (v. 22). It was their lack of true wisdom (despite their claim to possess it) that led them to "exchange the glory of the immortal God for images" of human or other creatures (v. 23), and as a result "God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity," especially homosexual behavior (vv. 24-28). Thus it is the lack of true wisdom that ultimately led to idolatry and sexual immorality. Presumably, true wisdom (1:22) would have led Gentiles to avoid idolatry and sexual immorality (1:23-28). To Paul's way of thinking, true wisdom (1 Corinthians 1-4; cf. Rom. 1:22) will keep the Corinthians from sexual immorality (1 Cor. 4:18-7:40; cf. Rom. 1:24) and idolatry (1 Corinthians 8-14; cf. Rom. 1:23).

According to Romans 1:21-28, this is all tied to the glory of God. The foolishness of the Gentiles is related to the fact that they "neither glorified [God] as God nor gave thanks to him" (v. 21), and, as indicated above, their idolatry is described as an act of exchanging "the glory of the immortal God for images" (v. 23). The proper glorification of God, which should have been expected, was replaced by idolatry and sexual immorality. Paul's imperatives to glorify God in concluding the sections on sexual immorality and idolatry in 1 Corinthians (6:18; 10:14) reflect a similar pattern of thought (see our discussion of the letter's structure, below).

47. For example, the emissaries of Isa. 66:19 are sent to those "who have not yet heard my name," and Paul in Rom. 15:20 evangelizes "where the name Christ has not yet been named" (248-49).

### 2. *Gentile Conversion — 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10*

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul describes the conversion of Thessalonian pagans in terms consonant with this understanding of Gentile sin. Paul says that they “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead” (1 Thess. 1:9-10). Here Gentile conversion is understood to entail the rejection of idolatry in favor of the service of the true and living God and his resurrected Son. Christine Elizabeth Hayes points out that in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 “peoples who do not know God are described as sexually immoral and impure. By contrast, those called by God must be sanctified, by avoiding the sexual immorality (*porneia*) and impurity of such peoples.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, according to 1 Thessalonians, those who convert to the God of Israel and of Jesus Christ must turn away from both idols (1:9-10) and sexual immorality (4:3-8) to worship him. The notion of hope expressed by the short phrase “wait for his Son from heaven” (1:10) is expanded in 4:13-18, where future bodily resurrection is promised to all those who are “in Christ” when Jesus “descends from heaven.”

### 3. *Paul’s Missionary Agenda — Romans 15*

Romans 15 is, as we have already hinted, an important chapter for our understanding of Paul’s missionary agenda. “At this important turning point, the conclusion of his missionary endeavors in the east, Paul provides significant insights into what he had been doing and what were his hopes for the future. He thus throws light on essential features of his ministry, including its goals and motivating power, its content and extraordinary results.”<sup>49</sup> Particularly significant is verse 16, which contains an uncommon concentration of Old Testament cultic terminology.<sup>50</sup> Consistent with the eschatological vision of Isaiah 66:18-21,<sup>51</sup> Paul’s *raison d’être* is explained using temple imagery: as “a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles,” Paul is to discharge his “priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (15:16; cf. Isa. 66:20).<sup>52</sup> In this way, Paul demonstrates his continuity with Israel’s salvation history, while at the same

48. C. E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 93.

49. O’Brien, *Consumed by Passion*, 27.

50. O’Brien, *Consumed by Passion*, 30-32.

51. See Riesner’s analysis (above).

52. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (WBC 38B; Dallas: Word, 2002), 860-61, observes that Paul’s eschatological vision is even more radical than that of Isaiah. In Isa. 66:20 it is the Diaspora Jews who form the “offering” in the temple. In Rom. 15:16 it is the Gentiles themselves who either form or perform (or both) the offering.

time presenting a radical eschatological vision where cultic language is transformed into the noncultic activity of gospel preaching.<sup>53</sup> “Paul’s purpose seems to be to underline the eschatologically new fact that within God’s redefined people (‘set apart by the Holy Spirit’) all ministry on behalf of others is priestly ministry (as in Phil. 2:25), and that cultic sacrifice has been replaced by the sacrifice of committed day-to-day living in personal relationships (12:1).”<sup>54</sup>

In other words (but with the same cluster of Old Testament ideas in mind), Paul states that his purpose is for the Gentiles to *glorify* God (15:6, 7, 9; cf. Isa. 66:18, 23). Romans 15:7 makes it clear that this will be achieved, not by cultic activity on the part of the Gentiles, but by ethical behavior. “Accept one another, as Christ has accepted you, in order to bring glory to God.” This verse, along with the verses immediately preceding this section (15:1-4), indicates that the solution to these ethical problems is grounded in the vicarious servant-hearted suffering of Jesus Christ for his people.<sup>55</sup> Four Old Testament quotations reiterate the goal of the Gentiles praising God along “with his people” (Rom. 15:9-12). The final quotation returns to the notion of hope introduced in 15:4, which Paul expands into a prayer in 15:13. Hence Romans 15:5-13 may be seen as a fuller description of “the obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26; cf. 15:18) — that is, the constancy of Christian conduct arising from the Gentiles’ believing reception of the message of the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>56</sup>

Paul’s aims and agenda for his Gentile converts, then, can be summarized as follows. The Gentiles fail to glorify God, chiefly through idolatry and sexual immorality (which reflect their lack of true wisdom). The proclamation of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is a call to enter the new eschatological age established in and by him. It demands that all people submit in unity to Christ, living out the true wisdom of the other-person-centered lifestyle of the cross. They must abandon sexual immorality and idolatry and instead worship the one true God. The goal of all of this is the glory of God. The Gentiles’ lives will be characterized by expectant hope for the final consummation of God’s glory (and so their own glorification) in the future bodily resurrection. When we come to 1 Corinthians, much is gained by reading Paul’s letter with this in mind.

53. O’Brien, *Consumed by Passion*, 30-32.

54. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 868.

55. This is confirmed by the quotation of Isa. 52:15 in Rom. 15:21: Paul’s whole international missionary agenda has been shaped by the Suffering Servant song of Isa. 52:13-53:12. The servant who suffers vicariously for the sins of his people must be proclaimed to nations and kings.

56. O’Brien, *Consumed by Passion*, 33-34.

### III. THE INTERPRETATION OF 1 CORINTHIANS

The main task of an introduction to a commentary is to provide some orientation to the text as a whole, to its overall structure and argument; the commentary proper fills in the details. When it comes to 1 Corinthians, the arrangement and integrity of the letter have been the subject of long debate.<sup>57</sup> The apparent diversity of issues that it treats has led to equally diverse approaches to understanding its essential nature. Some scholars have argued that the letter is actually a composite document.<sup>58</sup> Such theories grow out of a conviction that 1 Corinthians is not only unusually long, but also lacks a discernible global structure. Although Jerome Murphy-O'Connor rejects such partition theories, he finds them understandable in that, in his view, "[t]he salient feature of I Corinthians is the absence of any detectable logic in the arrangement of its contents."<sup>59</sup>

For many the only logic of the letter's arrangement is that Paul deals with oral reports in chapters 1–6 before addressing matters raised in the Corinthian letter to him in chapters 7–16 (7:1: "Now concerning the matters about which you wrote").<sup>60</sup> Murphy-O'Connor exemplifies those scholars who argue for the integrity of the epistle as we have it but find great difficulty in discerning an overall structure. David Garland believes that the letter "may be summed up as a warning against various perils,"<sup>61</sup> and his outline of the letter entails a listing of topics under twelve Roman numerals.<sup>62</sup> However, Mitchell and others have raised doubts over whether the order of material in 1 Corinthians is actually dictated by the sequence in which the issues are raised in the oral and written reports that Paul received.<sup>63</sup> Mitchell's work represents an important step forward in that she pursues a more significant underlying unity to the letter.<sup>64</sup> Many commentators follow her

57. Shorter versions of the next two sections appeared as R. E. Ciampa and B. S. Rosner, "The Structure and Argument of 1 Corinthians," *NTS* 52 (2006), 205-18.

58. Thiselton, 36-37, mentions the partition theories of J. Weiss (who believed that there were two or three underlying letters), W. Schmithals (three), K.-K. Yeo (four), and R. Jewett (five). See H. Merklein, "Die Einheitlichkeit des ersten Korintherbriefes," *ZNW* 75 (1984), 153-83; and M. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), for effective responses to such partition theories. For a brief discussion see Lang, 6-7.

59. J. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 253.

60. Cf.  $\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\ \delta\acute{\epsilon}$ , repeated in 7:25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12.

61. Garland, 21.

62. Garland, 22-23. Witherington, vi-viii, 76, similarly breaks the main body (the *probatio*, in his understanding) of Paul's letter (1:18–16:12) into nine distinct "arguments."

63. M. M. Mitchell, "Concerning  $\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\ \delta\acute{\epsilon}$  in 1 Corinthians," *NovT* 31 (1989), 229-56, disputes the assumption that  $\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\ \delta\acute{\epsilon}$  in 1 Corinthians always signals a reference to the letter Paul received from the Corinthians (see also Thiselton, 34-35). A number of other commentators notice that in chs. 7–16 Paul deals with oral reports in 11:2-34 and 15:1-58.

64. Karl Barth may be considered a significant precursor. In his view, "[t]he haphazard character of the series of subjects dealt with in I Cor. i.-xiv. is not to be disputed," but

in affirming that Paul's main purpose in writing 1 Corinthians is to unify the congregation.

Rhetorical and other approaches have also been used to analyze the structure of this letter.<sup>65</sup> Many see the letter as an example of deliberative rhetoric, a series of arguments Paul musters to persuade the audience to heed his appeal to unity in 1:10. Hence 1:10 is thought to be the theme statement for the entire letter. Among those who support this view are W. H. Wuellner,<sup>66</sup> G. A. Kennedy,<sup>67</sup> and, most fully, M. Mitchell, whose book, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, is in effect an examination of 1 Corinthians in the light of the thesis that Paul wrote with one overriding aim, that is, to persuade the Corinthian Christians to become unified. She claims that this was the understanding of some of the earliest readers of the letter, including 1 Clement, Ignatius of Antioch, the Muratorian Canon, and the early Greek commentators. Even Richard Hays, whose commentary is so sensitive to the influence of the Old Testament on 1 Corinthians, calls it "the fundamental theme of the letter."<sup>68</sup> In 1:18–4:21 Paul opposes disunity in the church in general; in chapters 5–16 he takes on the issues that must be dealt with before genuine unity can be achieved. 1 Corinthians, then, is Paul's attempt to urge the Corinthians to come together in unity.

While it is true that disunity is a major theme of the letter, extending beyond chapters 1–4,<sup>69</sup> to give it primacy obscures other equally important concerns. Our contention is that rather than reading 1 Corinthians with Greco-Roman rhetorical categories in mind, it is better to take Old Testament and Jewish frames of reference as the primary lens that clarifies our understanding of both the form and contents of the letter.<sup>70</sup> In this light, disunity is one of several behaviors that characterize the Corinthians as

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"whether Paul's reflections upon the subjects dealt with in I Cor. i.-xiv. are as disparate as these subjects themselves, or rather whether a thread cannot be discovered which binds them internally into a whole" (Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1933], 12, cf. 102-3).

65. See, e.g., M. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*; H. D. Betz and M. M. Mitchell, "First Epistle to the Corinthians," *ABD* 1:1139-54; Witherington, vi-viii, 76.

66. W. H. Wuellner, "Greek Rhetoric and Pauline Argumentation," in *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition* (ed. W. R. Schoedel and R. L. Wilken; Paris: Beauchesne, 1979), 177-88: "[1:10] expresses the main theme of the whole of 1 Cor[inthians]" (182-83).

67. G. A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 24: "He follows this [1:4-9] with the proposition of the entire letter, summarized in a single sentence."

68. Hays, 21.

69. The letter contains not only explicit references to Corinthian factionalism but also many terms, appeals, and themes that deal with divisions in the church. See M. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 68-80, 180-83.

70. On the use of the Old Testament in 1 Corinthians see B. S. Rosner and R. E. Ciampa, "1 Corinthians," in the *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. D. A. Carson and G. K. Beale; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

“worldly,” as “acting like mere human beings” (3:3). Paul’s goal is bigger than merely having them live harmoniously.

## A. The Structure of 1 Corinthians

As noted above, in “The Church ‘Belonging to God’” (Section I.B.), there is good evidence that in 1 Corinthians Paul basically opposes the infiltration of Corinthian social values into that city’s church. Our contention is that Paul’s attempt to sort out the serious problems within the largely Gentile church in Corinth consists primarily of a confrontation with the church over purity concerns in general and two vices in particular.

It is widely recognized that in early Jewish and Christian thinking Gentiles were consistently characterized by two particularly abhorrent vices: sexual immorality and idolatry. Furnish writes: “For the apostle as for the Jews, rejecting idolatry and abstaining from sexual immorality . . . are key identity markers of the faithful community.”<sup>71</sup> For example, in relation to New Testament evidence, Peder Borgen notes that the vice lists of Galatians 5:19-21 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, which in context contrast pagan and Christian lifestyles, have only these two sins in common. They also occur in Colossians 3:5; Ephesians 5:5; Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; Revelation 22:15. Borgen concludes that “[t]hese two vices are central in Jewish characterising of the pagan way of life.”<sup>72</sup> A clear example from early Jewish writings is the *Sibylline Oracles*, for, as J. J. Collins observes, “[t]he sins in which the Sibyl expresses most interest are idolatry and sexual offenses.”<sup>73</sup> Of particular interest for 1 Corinthians is *Sibylline Oracles* 3, “[t]he main message of [which] . . . would seem to lie in the denunciation of idolatry and sexual abuses and then the advocacy of the Temple.”<sup>74</sup> That the emphasis on these two vices in early Jewish and Christian thought is based on scriptural interpretation can be seen in William Loader’s observation that much Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Decalogue elevates the prohibition of adultery above murder such that idolatry heads the first table and sexual immorality the second.<sup>75</sup>

Paul’s focus on the issues of sexual immorality and idolatry (see below) suggests that purity issues are of greater concern to him than the issue

71. V. P. Furnish, *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 51.

72. P. Borgen, *Early Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 240, 245.

73. J. J. Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” *OTP* 1:317-472; here 323.

74. J. J. Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” 1:357.

75. W. Loader, *The Septuagint, Sexuality and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 7; “The effect is to make it [adultery] the first of the second table, thus to elevate its significance for hearers who sense this bipartite division of the decalogue, suggested to hearers by the two tablets of stone (Exod 31:18) and by the changed focus of the content in the second half. Adultery receives, in that sense, greater prominence.”

of communal harmony. Concern about purity issues is to be expected in a situation where the infiltration of outside influences is believed to have deleterious effects on the health of the worshiping community.<sup>76</sup> As David deSilva argues, the gospel had a significant transforming effect on Christian thinking about purity issues, but “[h]oliness and purity both still require boundaries to be drawn and maintained between the surrounding culture and the Christian group.”<sup>77</sup>

In 1 Corinthians purity issues are reflected most specifically in the identification of the readers as the temple of God (3:17) and the discussion of the moral implications of that understanding. The command to “clean out the old leaven” (5:7) and to “purge the evil person” from among them (5:11-13) reflects the language of purity concerns, and Paul’s command to avoid prostitutes is based on the radical impurity that would bring to their Spirit-indwelt temple (6:16-19). Purity concerns are also reflected in the issue of the children’s uncleanness or holiness based on the status of the unbelieving husband (7:14) and in the concern not to provoke the Lord by drinking from both his cup and those of demons (10:21-22). “Much of Paul’s use of purity terminology,” Michael Newton points out, “centres upon his view that the believers constitute the Temple of God and as such enjoy the presence of God in their midst”; if that presence is to remain with them, they must maintain the purity of the community.<sup>78</sup> The broader issue of the influence of Corinthian cultural values and behaviors within the church of that city is to be understood as a fundamental concern for the purity of the worshiping community. Jacob Neusner highlights the place of idolatry and sexual relations in the biblical texts that deal with the question of impurity,<sup>79</sup> while Hayes points to a number of Pauline passages that “suggest that the impurity of unbelievers, arising from deeds of sexual immorality and idolatry in particular, defiles the holiness of believers.”<sup>80</sup> Judith Lieu speaks of “[t]he pervasive rejection of the ways of the Gentiles, epitomized by idolatry and by a range of other ‘vices’ of sexual and intemperate behaviour” as boundary markers found in much “early Christian” literature.<sup>81</sup> She also sees sexual immorality and eating food offered to idols as “scripturally hallowed models of the dissolution of identity.”<sup>82</sup>

76. As pointed out by J. M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 104, “The need to observe sacred boundaries, variously articulated, but in Judaism particularly through food and purity laws and the structuring of the Temple, correlates with the importance laid on well-defined and well-protected social boundaries.”

77. D. A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 294.

78. M. Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul* (SNTSMS 53; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1985), 52.

79. J. Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), 13-15.

80. C. E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities*, 93.

81. Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 133.

82. Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 137 and n. 110.

In our view, in 4:18–7:40<sup>83</sup> Paul deals primarily with issues related to sexual immorality, first in a negative treatment of its manifestations in the church in Corinth (4:18–6:20) and then in a positive treatment of marriage and sexual relationships<sup>84</sup> (ch. 7; note how the chapter is introduced in v. 2 with a reference to *porneia*). And chapters 8–14 deal with the issue of idolatry, beginning, again, with a negative treatment of its manifestations in Corinth (8:1–11:1) and then moving to a more positive treatment of the proper worship of the one true God (chs. 11–14; note how 12:2 relates the following material back to the issue of idolatry). Paul explicitly ties these two vices to their Old Testament background in his discussion of Israel's failures in 1 Corinthians 10:7–8, and their inclusion in the vice list of 5:11 is based on their inclusion in a list of sins associated with a Deuteronomic expulsion formula.<sup>85</sup>

Toward the end of each negative section (4:18–6:20 and 8:1–11:1) Paul provides both negative and positive imperatives using the same language relating to the broader theme. In concluding the negative section on sexual immorality, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to “flee sexual immorality” (6:18) and to “glorify God” with their bodies (6:20). In concluding the negative section on idolatry, Paul exhorts them to “flee idolatry” (10:14) and to do everything “to the glory of God” (10:31).<sup>86</sup> Thus 4:18–7:40 and 8:1–14:40 can be seen as discreet units dealing with issues of sexuality and worship respectively.

Almost all commentators see chapters 1–4 and 15 as unified sections. Chapters 1–4 urge the Corinthians to be united in the proclamation and service-oriented lifestyle of the cross, for they have entered the new eschatological age of salvation. There is a negative treatment of the wisdom of the world, which looks to human powers and authorities (1:10–2:5), followed by a positive section that proclaims the Christ-centered wisdom of the cross (2:6–3:5) and an application to Christian ministers (3:6–4:17). Paul treats various antisocial vices in the unit, such as divisions (1:10, 13), quarreling (1:11; 3:3), jealousy (3:3), boasting about human leaders (3:21), and pride and arrogance (4:18–19).<sup>87</sup> Negative and positive summary imperatives also occur here. The Corinthians are told: “no more boasting about

83. See the commentary for a defense of the demarcation of the various units.

84. This arrangement of ethical material is reminiscent of Hellenistic Jewish parenesis (reported by K.-W. Niebuhr, *Gesetz und Paränese: Katechismusartige Weisungsreihen in der frühjüdischen Literatur* [WUNT 2.28; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987], 232), which discusses sexual deviations, such as incest and homosexual behavior, and sexual relations in marriage in close proximity.

85. B. S. Rosner, *Paul, Scripture, and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5–7* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 69; cf. Hays, 86. 2 Corinthians carries forward this stress on the dangers of idolatry (2 Cor. 6:16–7:1) and sexual immorality (2 Cor. 12:19–21).

86. Once these comparable commands are recognized, it is also worth noticing that these are also the same two passages in which Paul cites the Corinthian slogan that “all things are lawful,” reinforcing the idea that they are parallel.

87. Cf. “slanderers” in 1 Cor. 5:11 and 6:10.

human leaders!" (3:21), and the positive injunction, "let those who boast, boast in the Lord" (1:31).<sup>88</sup>

1 Corinthians comes to a climax in chapter 15 with Paul's discussion of the resurrection as it relates to the ultimate triumph of Christ over all adversaries and the final transformation of our corruptible humanity into humanity that fully reflects God's glory.

The main sections of the letter may thus be outlined as follows:

- I. Letter Opening (1:1-9)
- II. True and False Wisdom and Corinthian Factionalism (1:10-4:17)
  - A. Factions in the Community (1:10-17)
  - B. Negative Treatment: "No More Boasting about Human Leaders" (1:18-2:5)
  - C. Positive Treatment: "Let Those Who Boast Boast in the Lord" (2:6-3:4)
  - D. Application to the Church, Ministers, and Ministry (3:5-4:17)
- III. "Flee Sexual Immorality" and "Glorify God with Your Bodies" (4:18-7:40)
  - A. Negative Treatment: "Flee Sexual Immorality" (and Greed) (4:18-6:20)
  - B. Positive Treatment: "Glorify God with Your Bodies" (7:1-40)
- IV. "Flee Idolatry" and "Glorify God" in Your Worship (8:1-14:40)
  - A. Negative Treatment: "Flee Idolatry" (Food Offered to Idols) (8:1-11:1)
  - B. Positive Treatment: "Glorify God" in Your Worship (11:2-14:40)
- V. The Resurrection and Consummation (15:1-58)
- VI. Letter Closing (16:1-24)

The main exception to this outline of the letter is 6:1-11, which seems to have nothing to do with sexual immorality. Interestingly, the only other specific vice to "flee" in the New Testament, apart from sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6) and idolatry (1 Corinthians 10), is greed (1 Tim. 6:11; in context, literally, "the love of money"; 6:10). Typically Jews and Christians added greed as a third member of the unholy triad of vices that rightly condemns the heathen. Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 11.2, makes explicit the presupposition of this material, that greed was a typical sin of the Gentiles: "If a man does not avoid love of money, . . . he will be judged as one of the Gentiles." Cf. Philo, *On the Virtues* 180-82, which states that the conversion

88. The observation of this last sentence is drawn from Andrew Williamson's unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Sydney/Moore Theological College, on the influence of the murder commandment on Paul's ethics. The two commands are not placed as strategically as their counterparts in chs. 5-7 and 8-10. They do nonetheless serve as excellent summaries of the negative and positive panels in chs. 1-4, and they maintain a focus on true worship in the fullest sense, "to boast" being a synonym of "to glorify."

of pagans from idolatry entails a new lifestyle, which is, among other things, “superior to the desire for money.” In 1 Corinthians “greed”<sup>89</sup> is mentioned alongside sexual immorality and idolatry in each of this letter’s three vice lists (5:10, 11; 6:10), and it is likely that greed was a primary motivation for the lawsuit in 6:1-11.

The assertion that 1 Corinthians may be summarized as Paul’s attempt to rid the Corinthians of the sins of sexual immorality, greed, and idolatry is given remarkable support in 1 Corinthians 5:9-10. In these verses Paul recalls having already written a letter to the Corinthians, and he summarizes this “previous letter” in strikingly similar terms: the Corinthian church is not to be characterized by sexual immorality, greed, theft (a synonym of greed), and idolatry.<sup>90</sup> Apparently Paul’s first two letters to the Corinthians had a similar thrust. Paul clarifies in 1 Corinthians that his primary concern is not so much with the presence of these vices in the world at large (as the Corinthians had thought), but with their presence within the Corinthian church (5:9-13).

It should also not escape our notice that the two extant letters Paul likely wrote to churches from Corinth, namely, Romans and 1 Thessalonians, also support our view of the thrust of 1 Corinthians. As we will see below, in both cases the letters contain similar patterns of thought to 1 Corinthians. 1 Thessalonians, in particular, overlaps with 1 Corinthians in terms of its content. Robert M. Grant also thinks it significant that Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians from Corinth and summarizes the four main points of the letter as touching idolatry (1:9-10), avoiding sexual immorality (4:3-6), the necessity of work (a topic not unrelated to greed; 4:11-12), and the impending return of Jesus (4:15-17).<sup>91</sup> If, as seems likely, Paul’s letter writing while in Corinth reflected his preaching and teaching in that city, and vice versa, it would seem that the apostle to the Gentiles’ opposition to the typically pagan sins of sexual immorality and idolatry was a consistent mark of his work in that city.

## **B. The Argument of 1 Corinthians**

Having observed that the four main elements of 1 Corinthians are (in order) wisdom, sexuality, worship, and resurrection/consummation, it is noteworthy that similar patterns of thought appear elsewhere in Paul’s letters in shorter compass. Taken together, they shed light on the argument of

89. Gk. πλεονέκτης.

90. CD iv 15-17 confirms the Jewishness of this triad of sins: “Belial’s three nets . . . the first is fornication; the second, wealth; the third, defilement of the temple.”

91. Robert M. Grant, *Paul in the Roman World: The Conflict at Corinth* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 1: “These points do not reflect the semiphilosophical concerns found in the letters to the Corinthians, but they offer insights into Paul’s ideas when he was writing.”

1 Corinthians. The three texts which we considered above in relation to the aims of Paul as apostle to the Gentiles (Section II.E.), Romans 1:21-28, 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, and Romans 15:5-16, reveal a pattern that helps explain the order and coherence of material in 1 Corinthians.

The following chart displays the patterns found in the three texts and their relevance to the argument of 1 Corinthians.

|                       | Romans 1:21-28                              | 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10              | Romans 15:5-16  |
|-----------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. 1 Cor. 1:10-4:17   | Lack of wisdom [and failure to glorify God] |                                     | Paul calls for unity  |
| 2. 1 Cor. 4:18-7:40   | leads to sexual immorality                  |                                     | in order that ethical problems can be resolved so that the Gentile believers will glorify God |
| 3a. 1 Cor. 8:1-11:1   | and idolatry                                | Gentile converts go from idolatry   |   |
| 3b. 1 Cor. 11:2-14:40 |   | to worship of the one true God      |   |
| 4. 1 Cor. 15:1-58     |   | and wait for their resurrected Lord | and hope in his Son   |

This “shape” to Paul’s teaching is evident across the breadth of his corpus. To put the pattern in point form, with the overall goal of the glory of God, we find:

1. The proclamation of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is a call to enter the new eschatological age established in and by him. It demands that all people submit in unity to Christ, living out the wisdom of the other-person-centered lifestyle of the cross.
2. They must abandon the Gentile vice of sexual immorality (to the glory of God).
3. They must abandon the Gentile vice of idolatry, and give proper worship to the one true God (to the glory of God).
4. The Gentiles’ lives will be characterized by expectant hope for the final consummation of God’s glory (and so their own glorification) in the future bodily resurrection.

The same pattern, with some flexibility, is also evident in Ephesians (twice), Colossians, and Titus. In *Ephesians 4:1-30*, after a doxology ascribing glory to God in the church and in Christ (Eph. 3:21):

1. Paul, the suffering apostle (Eph. 4:1), calls his readers to live in humility, gentleness, patience, and love (Eph. 4:2), maintaining the unity to which they have been called in Christ by the Spirit (Eph. 4:4-16).
3. They must not live in the foolishness of the idolatrous Gentiles (Eph. 4:17-18),

2. who are sexually immoral (Eph. 4:19).
4. Instead, they should live now in expectation of the day of redemption to come (Eph. 4:20-30).

The pattern is then repeated in *Ephesians 4:30–5:17*:

1. As God in Christ forgave them, so they are to live lives of kind, tenderhearted forgiveness (Eph. 4:30-31), which is the lifestyle of the cross (Eph. 5:1-2).
2. Sexual immorality and
3. greed (which is idolatry) are singled out as sins that must be put to death (Eph. 5:3-5) because of the coming wrath of God (Eph. 5:6).
4. This is true eschatological wisdom (Eph. 5:7-17, esp. 15-17; cf. 6:12).

*Colossians 3:1-17* presents the same logic, but in reverse order:

4. The eschatological age of salvation has come in Christ; but it is still hidden, awaiting the final appearance of Christ and his people in glory (Col. 3:1-4).
3. Therefore the Colossians must put to death Gentile vices, beginning with sexual immorality and
2. greed, which is idolatry (Col. 3:5-10). They should worship in word and deed for the sake of Christ's name and the praise of God (Col. 3:16-17).
1. This is because of the unity in Christ (Col. 3:11), which shows itself in the cross-centered lifestyle of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and forgiveness (Col. 3:12-15).

Three of the four elements of the pattern are prominent in *Titus 1–2*:

1. The new age manifested by God's word through Paul's preaching (Titus 1:1-3; cf. 2:11)
2. calls believers to be the husband of one wife, self-controlled, and pure (Titus 1:6; 2:2, 5-6), renouncing ungodliness and worldly passions (Titus 2:12)
4. as they wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).

That these outlines have affinities with Jewish moral teaching contemporary with Paul which stand in a biblical tradition can be seen from three examples from the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*<sup>92</sup> and the *Sibylline Ora-*

92. In the *Testament of Judah 18–19*, (2) the readers are exhorted to abstain from sexual immorality, for it blinds the soul (*T. Jud.* 18:2, 6), from lewdness and harlotry (*T. Jud.* 18:2; 23:1-2), and (3) from idols and idolatries (*T. Jud.* 19:1; 23:1), (4) in view of the resurrection unto life of the patriarchs and martyrs, when all the people shall glorify the Lord forever

cles.<sup>93</sup> The order of the elements is not the same as (most of) the Pauline examples, and temple worship is probably meant more literally. Also, reference to the cross is obviously not present, being by definition a Christian motivation. Nonetheless, they add further support to our contention that Paul's ethics in general and 1 Corinthians in particular are best read as in line with biblical and Jewish moral teaching.

### C. The Biblical-Theological Framework of 1 Corinthians

Having detected the main elements of the logic and structure of 1 Corinthians in relation to Paul's thought elsewhere in his letters, and even in a few case studies from Second Temple Jewish literature, it is useful to sketch the biblical-theological framework that informs his argument. This can be done in two ways. First, we offer a global comparison of two key Old Testament books with 1 Corinthians to confirm the origin not only of many of the specifics but also of the general shape of Paul's response to the problems in Corinth. Secondly, we outline the main features of the biblical-theological framework that together give the letter its unity of purpose.

#### 1. Two Key Old Testament Texts

Although Paul draws on a wide range of Old Testament material in writing 1 Corinthians, he seems to have taken his cue for his work in Corinth from two Old Testament books in particular: Deuteronomy and Isaiah. A third key book, Malachi, to which Paul alludes in 1 Corinthians 1:2, is treated in the next section. At this point a general comparison of Deuteronomy and Isaiah with 1 Corinthians reveals the extent to which 1 Corinthians may be described as "a hermeneutical event,"<sup>94</sup> as a text best read in its inextricable and manifold relationship to the Scriptures of Israel.

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(*T. Jud.* 25:1-5). In the *Testament of Dan* 5, (1) the readers are exhorted to speak truth with their neighbors and to live in peace, united to one another with a true heart (*T. Dan* 5:2-3), (2) in order not to fall into lust and to be on guard against all the spirits of fornication (*T. Dan* 5:5-6), (3) and to return to the Lord and be brought into his sanctuary (*T. Dan* 5:9) (4) in anticipation of the salvation and victory of the Lord, when the saints shall rest in Eden and the righteous shall rejoice in the new Jerusalem, which shall be unto the glory of God forever and ever (*T. Dan* 5:10-13).

93. In the *Sibylline Oracles*, Book 3, (3) idolatry is denounced (*Sib. Or.* 3:35-39, 46, 741-43, 762; 4:34-35) for the sake of true temple worship (*Sib. Or.* 3:726-33, 746) and the great glory of God (*Sib. Or.* 4:37-38, 760-61), (2) as are adultery (*Sib. Or.* 3:46, 751), immoral widows (*Sib. Or.* 3:53-55), and homosexual behavior (*Sib. Or.* 3:764), (1) in the context of the promise of a renewed holy race that fully honors the temple of God (*Sib. Or.* 3:573-600).

94. Cf. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 35.

*a. Deuteronomy and 1 Corinthians*

An accurate assessment of the role of Deuteronomy in 1 Corinthians cannot be formed simply by noticing quotations and even allusions. We need to consider how the books compare in global terms and to ascertain where they are situated in the context of the salvation history presented in the Bible.

In the context of the Pentateuch, the book of Deuteronomy is Moses' attempt to spell out for God's people the theological and ethical consequences of the exodus deliverance. Put another way, Deuteronomy explains the nature of an obedient response to God's grace. The collections of laws in chapters 5 and 12–26 stipulate that the Lord is to be worshiped at the place and in the way that he chooses (cf., e.g., ch. 12) and insist that nothing is to be done to defile the land, which is the place where God is encountered (cf. 12:7). In particular, God's people are to shun the idolatry (e.g., 12:1-6) and sexual immorality (e.g., 22:21; 23:2, 17-18; cf. 31:16) of the original inhabitants of the land, and they are to maintain justice and right relationships with each other. To this end, Moses appoints judges (ch. 1), calls on the people to listen to his teaching (4:1 and especially the Shema in 6:1-18), marks their redemption from slavery in Egypt with the Passover commemoration (ch. 16), also celebrating it in song (ch. 32), and finally inaugurates a new covenant at Moab (29:1).

Curiously, various elements strike a pessimistic note and point beyond the book to the need for the future decisive action of God. That little can be expected from God's people is signaled in chapter 2, where they are unfavorably compared to the Moabites and Ammonites. It is also expressed throughout chapters 5–11, where repeated calls to obey or remember (e.g., 5:1, 31-33; 6:1-14; 7:12-15) suggest a negative expectation. Israel's spiritual incapacity is repeatedly underscored (e.g., 29:4). Nothing less than circumcision of the heart is required, which only God can perform (30:6; cf. 10:16). Moses predicts Israel's apostasy (31:16-18; 32:19-21, 26), and he himself dies outside the land (ch. 34), suggesting that there is little hope for the nation. Moses' song ends with the one reference to atonement in the entire book (32:43). The new covenant teaching of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, in which the problem of the human heart is resolved, is thus anticipated in Deuteronomy.<sup>95</sup>

In many ways the theological or canonical setting of 1 Corinthians is analogous to that of Deuteronomy, with some major twists. Paul, like Mo-

95. We owe much of this reading of Deuteronomy to J. G. Millar, *Now Choose Life: Theology and Ethics in Deuteronomy* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998); for a summary see Millar, "Deuteronomy," *NDBT*, 159-65. Cf. J. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), who argues that the Pentateuch as a whole presents the way of Abraham, who lived by faith before the law, as better than that of Moses, who failed to keep the law once it was given. Cf. R. W. L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

ses, seeks to spell out for the new people of God the theological and ethical consequences of the act of salvation that is an exodus. He too wishes to explain the nature of an obedient response to God's grace. The apostle stops short of calling himself a second Moses, but he does compare and contrast his role as a "minister of the new covenant" with that of Moses in 2 Corinthians 3. He follows the pattern of Moses' appointing judges in Deuteronomy 1 (and Exodus 18) in 1 Corinthians 6:1-6 when he tells the Corinthians to appoint wise and righteous laity to decide lesser civil cases of law between their brothers.<sup>96</sup> Also like Moses, Paul uses Exodus/Passover/Unleavened Bread imagery as a basis for his moral exhortation (e.g., 1 Cor. 5:6-8; 11:17-24). If in Deuteronomy repeated reference is made to "the place which the Lord your God will choose to have people call upon his name" (cf. LXX Deut. 12:11, 21, 26; 14:23-24; 16:2, 6, 11; 17:8, 10; 26:2) rather than to refer to that place, Paul says that the Corinthians are among those who call on the name of our Lord "in every place" (1 Cor. 1:2).

As pointed out above ("The Structure of 1 Corinthians"), two of Paul's main moral emphases in 1 Corinthians are, like Deuteronomy, the shunning of the sexual immorality and idolatry of the nations/Gentiles. As noted earlier, Paul's opposition to these two vices structures the central section of the letter, where most of the links with Deuteronomy are to be found.

In one sense, it is not only the Corinthian epistles that look back to Deuteronomy, but Deuteronomy that anticipates 1 (and 2) Corinthians. The "later days," to which Deuteronomy 4:30 refers, "when you will return to the LORD your God and obey him," of which the Hebrew prophets also speak,<sup>97</sup> is the time in which Paul locates the church of God in Corinth: the Corinthian believers are those "on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come" (1 Cor. 10:11). Paul writes as a minister of the new covenant, a covenant that Deuteronomy does not name but ultimately points forward to.

Especially in chapters 5-14, where Paul is primarily concerned with ethics and matters of conduct, four quotations of Deuteronomy and numerous clusters of allusions accord the book a major role in the composition of 1 Corinthians.<sup>98</sup> The main material of Deuteronomy, namely its laws, and the most famous texts, including the Shema and the Song of Moses, are strongly represented. Paul found in Deuteronomy and Moses a typological model and sympathetic ally. Both were concerned to explain to God's people an obedient response to God's grace in the light of the (new) exodus and (new) Passover. Both have the basic goal of securing the holiness and purity of that people in distinction from the nations and to promote the glory of God in "the land," in the case of Deuteronomy, or "in every place" (1 Cor. 1:2), as with 1 Corinthians.

96. See Rosner, *Paul, Scripture, and Ethics*, ch. 4.

97. Cf. Jer. 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezek. 38:16; Dan. 2:28; 10:14; Hos. 3:5.

98. Sean M. McDonough's recent study likewise points to the importance of Deuteronomy for the composition of 1 Corinthians: "Competent to Judge: The Old Testament Connection between 1 Corinthians 5 and 6," *JTS* 56 (2005), 99-102.

b. Isaiah and 1 Corinthians

The references to the book of Isaiah in the opening chapters of 1 Corinthians inform Paul's self-understanding as the prophetic herald of God's eschatological age (see Section II.D. above), and Isaiah's vision of the eschatological glory of God (66:18-24) gave Paul the map for his work as apostle to the Gentiles (see Section II.E.). Along with these connections, it is worth observing that Isaiah has a discernible "trajectory" that takes place across the book as a whole and within its individual sections.<sup>99</sup> This trajectory takes us from the existing world order (with its ruling powers: Israel, Assyria, and Babylon) to a new world order established by God. This happens via demolition and reconstruction, judgment and salvation, in that order. Its crucial transformative event is the justification that comes through the discipline of a Suffering Servant, and it climaxes in God's Spirit-empowered servants being sent out (e.g., Isa. 61:1) to preach the same two-edged message which divides the world into two groups: the judged and the saved.<sup>100</sup>

In Isaiah, as in 1 Corinthians 1-4, there are therefore two types of wisdom: human and divine. Both types of wisdom are ultimately attempts at salvation.<sup>101</sup> There is the human "wisdom" of the nations (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23): their rulers (Isa. 10:12-14; 19:11; cf. 1 Cor. 2:6), and their advisers ("the wise," Isa. 19:11-12), which will be brought to nothing (cf. 1 Cor. 1:20). There is also the human "wisdom" of those within Israel who recommend trust in foreign rulers, advisers ("the wise" and "the intelligent," Isa. 29:14; cf. 1 Cor. 1:19), and scribes (Isa. 33:18);<sup>102</sup> this, too, will be brought to nothing (1 Cor. 1:19-20), for they are, in fact, oppressive enemies of the Messiah and God's people.<sup>103</sup> The "wisdom" that trusts in foreign powers is wisdom that trusts in salvation by foreign gods — foolish idolatrous worship goes hand in hand with reliance upon Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon (Isa. 10:10-14; 44:17-20).

Divine wisdom, however, ultimately triumphs in Isaiah. There is a messianic figure introduced in 11:1, a "shoot from the stump of Jesse," who is introduced with wisdom terminology: the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, and might will rest upon him (cf. 1 Cor. 2:10).<sup>104</sup> Even though the "wise" in Israel were blind and deaf (Isa. 28:7, 12; 29:9-14; 30:9-11; 33:18), when Israel is restored and her righteous king reappears, the blind and deaf will see and hear again (Isa. 29:18; 30:20-22; 32:1-5; 33:17-22).<sup>105</sup>

99. Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah* (The Bible Speaks Today; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 30-31.

100. Webb, *Isaiah*, 30-33.

101. H. H. D. Williams, *The Wisdom of the Wise*, 88-100.

102. B. J. Oropeza, "Echoes of Isaiah in the Rhetoric of Paul: New Exodus, Wisdom and the Humility of the Cross in Utopian-Apocalyptic Expectations," in *The Intertexture of Apocalyptic Discourse in the New Testament* (ed. Duane F. Watson; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 97-98.

103. H. H. D. Williams, *The Wisdom of the Wise*, 88-100.

104. Oropeza, "Echoes of Isaiah," 98.

105. Oropeza, "Echoes of Isaiah," 98.

This king will put into effect God's plan of salvation, which is independent of human wisdom (Isa. 40:13-14, quoted in 1 Cor. 2:16). But, significantly, this salvific plan will come about in a strange and marvelous way. A Suffering Servant will come, and will suffer vicariously as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. The Servant Song of Isaiah 53 abounds in "wisdom" terminology, which is entirely consonant with the prominence of the wisdom motif throughout the whole of Isaiah. This servant shall be wise (Isa. 52:13), and by his knowledge he will justify many (Isa. 53:11). In this way, he will silence and amaze the rulers of the nations (Isa. 52:15, alluded to in 1 Cor. 2:9). So the eschatological judgment, salvation, and vindication of those who wait patiently for God is an amazing, unheard-of, unimaginable act of God's wisdom (Isa. 64:4; cf. 1 Cor. 2:9) — salvation through suffering. All are called, including Gentiles, to come under the rule of King David, where they will find repentance and forgiveness of sins (Isa. 55:3-7) through God's remarkable, transcendent wisdom: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD" (Isa. 55:8). At this time, God's dwelling will be with the one who, like the Suffering Servant, is poor and broken in spirit and who trembles at his word (Isa. 66:1-2; cf. 53:4).

The ultimate outcome of God's salvation-historical plan in Isaiah is the *glorification of God by the Gentiles through worship in a new temple*, with the corresponding judgment of those who refuse to submit to God (Isa. 56:6-7; 60; 62:2; 66:18-24). As we have seen above, Isaiah 66:18-21 is a key text for Paul's description of his own Gentile mission. Similarly, Tobit 14:5-7 looks forward to the mass conversion of the Gentiles accompanied by a clear rejection of idolatry on their part: "All the nations of the world shall be converted and shall offer God true worship; all shall abandon their idols." This would be the time when the Lord's name would be glorified in all the earth (Pss. 57:11; 86:9; Isa. 24:15; 42:10, 12; 66:18-19; Ezek. 39:21; 43:2-5; Mic. 5:4; Hab. 2:14).

Paul's astonishing message is that the Suffering Servant and the Davidic Messiah King, who could be mistaken for two different figures in Isaiah, have both arrived in the same person: "We proclaim Christ crucified, a scandal for Jews and foolishness for Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1:22-24). All the eschatological expectations of the prophets have come to fulfillment in this one man — in the suffering and exaltation of Christ, God's glory is fully revealed (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20).

## 2. Four Key Themes

Four themes arise from the biblical-theological basis of Paul's identity, aims, and agenda in his relations with the church in Corinth. These can be seen as driving his instruction throughout 1 Corinthians, and they give the

letter its essential unity. They are the lordship of Christ, worldwide worship, the eschatological temple, and the glory of God.

If the Corinthians' problems can be attributed to their cultural background, Paul's various responses may be ascribed to his understanding of the crucified Christ and his lordship over against all human and spiritual powers; in almost every case Paul pits Christ against the prevailing culture.<sup>106</sup> He appeals for unity in the name of Christ (1:10), who is the power and wisdom of God (2:23-24) and the foundation of the church (3:11). The church must be cleansed of the incestuous man because of Christ's sacrifice (5:7). To have relations with a prostitute is to violate Christ (6:15). Eating food sacrificed to idols must be avoided for the sake of one for whom Christ died (8:11) and in imitation of Christ (11:1). With respect to head coverings, he notes that Christ is the head of every man (11:3). The Lord's Supper must be celebrated by discerning "the body" of Christ (11:29). Spiritual gifts are to be exercised in order to build up the body of Christ (12:27). The resurrection of believers is grounded in the resurrection of Christ (15:3-23). Finally, all of history is about the subjection of all things under Christ's feet and his presentation of the fully redeemed kingdom/creation to God the Father (15:24-28). Throughout the letter "Christ" appears 64 times, "Lord" 66 times, and "Jesus" 26 times.<sup>107</sup>

Thus the nature of the eschatological temple and the glory that God is to receive through worldwide worship are understood in the light of the kingdom God has established through his Son, the universal Lord. The expectation that universal glory and worship would be given to God is at the heart of the significance of the lordship of Jesus Christ, whose post-crucifixion exaltation is understood by Paul and other New Testament authors to inaugurate the long-awaited time of the universal and eternal kingdom of God which would result in every knee bowing and every tongue confessing that "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11; cf. Rev. 15:3-4). 1 Corinthians comes to a climax in chapter 15 with Paul's discussion of the resurrection as it relates to the ultimate triumph of Christ over all adversaries and the final transformation of our corruptible humanity into humanity that fully reflects God's glory. It is no surprise that Paul offers the resurrection as the decisive basis for his ethical instruction,<sup>108</sup> especially given the relationship between Christ's resurrection, Christ's reign, and God's ultimate glory (15:24-28).

In 1 Corinthians 1:2 Paul refers to the Corinthians as those "who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints along with all those who

106. In a similar vein, K. Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, 103-4, argues that "what is at stake in Christianity is the rule of God and nothing else. That is the Either-Or with which he confronts the Corinthian Church all along the line."

107. R. B. Terry, "Patterns of Discourse Structure in I Corinthians," *JOTT* 7.4 (1996), 1-32, also draws attention to the centrality of Christ in 1 Corinthians.

108. See O. O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place — their Lord and ours.” Paul’s statement that the Corinthians are united with all those who call on the name of the Lord “in every place” evokes a significant scriptural tradition going back to a key theme in Deuteronomy, namely, the Lord’s selection of one particular place where people would call on his name (understood to refer to Jerusalem). Repeated reference is made to “the place which the Lord your God will choose to have people call upon his name” (cf. LXX Deut. 12:11, 21, 26; 14:23-24; 16:2, 6, 11; 17:8, 10; 26:2). Rather than refer to that place, however, Paul says that the Corinthians join those who call on the name of our Lord “in every place.”<sup>109</sup> The expression is found only in the Pauline corpus (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 2:14; 1 Thess. 1:8; 1 Tim. 2:8) and he uses it to refer to the worship of God that is spreading around the world through his ministry to the Gentiles.<sup>110</sup>

The expression echoes Malachi 1:11 LXX,<sup>111</sup> which (in a context of frustration over the way the Lord is being worshiped in Jerusalem) prophesies a future time when God would be worshiped by Gentiles “in every place”: “From the rising of the sun until its setting my name will be glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to my name and a pure offering, for my name is great among the Gentiles, says the Lord Almighty.”<sup>112</sup> Similarly, Haggai 2:7 anticipates a time when the Gentiles will glorify God in his temple: “all nations will come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts.” The echo of Malachi 1:11 in 1 Corinthians 1:2 suggests that the Corinthians are part of the fulfillment of God’s plan to be worshiped among all the Gentiles and that it is Paul’s ultimate purpose in writing to them to see them play their part in fulfilling this world-wide eschatological vision by glorifying God (see 6:20b and 10:31b).

If Malachi’s purpose and message were intended to help his audience come “to terms, mentally, spiritually and ethically, with the non-appearance of the new eschatological beginning”<sup>113</sup> which had been expected with the return from exile, Paul’s goal in 1 Corinthians is to get the Corinthians to come to terms, mentally, spiritually, and ethically, with its appearance.

109. Gk. ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ.

110. Significantly, in context all four texts evince one or more of the following temple motifs: offerings, worship, the Spirit, holiness, and prayer.

111. The influence of the text on the New Testament is suggested by the UBS<sup>4</sup> references to it in 2 Thess. 1:12 and Rev. 15:4 (note “all nations”) as also alluding to Mal. 1:11, picking up “the glorifying of God’s name” language. That Paul knew and appreciated Malachi is clear from his description of the fiery judgment of God’s temple in 1 Corinthians 3, which alludes to Malachi 3.

112. P. Towner, “The Pastoral Epistles,” *NDBT*, 330-36; here 333. As A. E. Hill notes (*Malachi: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1998], 188), this perspective of Malachi is not an isolated thought: “Like his earlier contemporaries Haggai (2:7) and Zechariah (8:22), Malachi calls upon his audience to recognize that the worship of Yahweh extends universally to the nations.”

113. K. Koch, *The Prophets: The Babylonian and Persian Periods* (trans. M. Kohl; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 179 (mentioned in A. E. Hill, *Malachi*, 45 n. 4).

Indeed, Paul's understanding that God would be glorified through Christ and his church — which includes people of all nations — is evident across the Pauline corpus and is one of the apostle's key pastoral and missiological motivations. His mission purpose is summarized in Romans 1:5: "to bring about the obedience of faith *for the sake of his name* among all the nations." He prays for the Thessalonian Christians, that "the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him" (2 Thess. 1:12), and for the Philippians, that they might be loving, knowledgeable, discerning, pure, blameless, and fruitful "to the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:9-11). The doxology of Galatians 1:5 ("to whom be glory forever and ever") indicates that God's role in providing redemption in Christ should result in eternal glory for him. The doxology in Ephesians 3:20-21 accords God "glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever." According to 2 Thessalonians 1:10, the purpose of the Lord's return is "to be glorified in his holy people."

Such universal worship also required a reconceptualizing of the nature and role of the temple, one which was already developing in Second Temple Judaism<sup>114</sup> and which is reflected in the rest of the New Testament as well.<sup>115</sup> Paul's understanding of the church as both the body of Christ (12:27: "you are the body of Christ"; cf. 12:12-27) and the temple of the Spirit (3:16: "you are the God's temple and God's Spirit dwells in you"; cf. 3:17; 6:19) is central to the ecclesiology of 1 Corinthians. Since they are the temples of God, Paul finds it imperative that the Corinthians glorify God. After all, "[t]he purpose of the OT temple . . . was to house and show forth God's glory,"<sup>116</sup> and all four Old Testament "temples" are filled with God's glory.<sup>117</sup>

#### **D. 1 Corinthians in Recent Research**

The serious study of the New Testament has always been an interdisciplinary undertaking. The New Testament documents were not let down from heaven on a string but were written by human authors in space and time such that, like any other book, they have a setting that has historical, geographical, linguistic, political, cultural, and social dimensions. In order to interpret them accurately, New Testament scholars look to a host of other disciplines for help. Progress in the study of 1 Corinthians in the last two

114. Cf. 1QS viii 5-10; ix 4-6.

115. Matt. 26:61; 27:40; Mark 14:58; 15:29; John 2:19, 21; 1 Pet. 2:5.

116. G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 252.

117. Cf. the tabernacle (Exod. 40:34-35; Num. 14:10; 16:42; cf. Exod. 20:24; 1 Sam. 4:21-22), Solomon's temple (2 Chr. 7:1-3 [3x]), the rebuilt temple (Ezra 7:27; 8:36; cf. 1 Macc. 15:9; 2 Macc. 3:2; 1 Esdr. 8:25), and the eschatological temple in Ezekiel (43:4-5). Likewise, the consummated temple in Revelation is associated with glory (Rev. 15:8; 21:11, 23, 26).

decades has arisen from studying the letter with aid from five such areas: (1) the study of ancient Judaism and the Jewish Scriptures; (2) ancient history and classics; (3) the social sciences; (4) classical rhetoric; and (5) theology and homiletics. We shall take these in order, setting out our view of their place in the study of 1 Corinthians.

### 1. *Biblical and Jewish Background*

Recognizing the main influences on a certain writer is generally accepted to be a crucial step in interpretation. This is just as true of Paul as it is of Karl Marx, C. S. Lewis, or Winston Churchill. It is also true in the study of music and art. Attempts to trace the origin of Paul's thought basically fall into two groups. One group emphasizes Paul's context, often appealing to the influence of Hellenism and other factors external to his letters. A second stresses Paul's personal experience and religious heritage, especially his Jewish training and indebtedness to the Scriptures and early Jewish moral teaching which built upon and elaborated their teaching on how to walk or conduct oneself.<sup>118</sup>

While the debate continues, increasingly there are those who argue that the Scriptures continue to exercise both theological and pragmatic/practical/halakic authority for Paul the Christian apostle. When Paul says hard things about the law of Moses, he does not discount its continuing ethical value.<sup>119</sup> The Old Testament and Jewish sources are the proper place to look for the origin of Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians. The influence of early Jewish moral teaching, with which Paul would have had sympathetic acquaintance through, among other channels, the exposition of the Scriptures in the synagogue, was often the lens through which Paul perceived the relevance of Scripture to the problems with which he wrestled in 1 Corinthians. It is not that he regarded this material as inspired, as he did the Jewish Bible.<sup>120</sup> But it is by historical necessity an interpreted-Scripture that Paul read, and the extant Jewish writings are the best place to discover these interpretations. Of course he did not always subscribe to those prior or traditional exegeses with which he was familiar, often offering his own distinctive interpretations of biblical texts, especially on matters like Christology and ecclesiology. Nonetheless, in Jewish moral teaching certain biblical passages become prominent, certain biblical moral scruples are emphasized, certain biblical concerns are connected, certain biblical forms of parenthesis

118. On the history of this debate see B. S. Rosner, *Understanding Paul's Ethics: Twentieth-Century Approaches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 5-10, and the chapters by Adolf von Harnack and Traugott Holtz.

119. See the remarks on Paul and the law in the commentary on 7:19.

120. See B. S. Rosner, "'Written for Us': Paul's View of Scripture," in *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (ed. David Wright and Philip Satterthwaite; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 81-105.

are popularized, certain biblical themes undergo development, and certain biblical exegeses and expositions are promulgated.<sup>121</sup> It is against this background that Paul's own use of Scripture is best understood.

## 2. *Greco-Roman Foreground*

Just as an awareness of his biblical/Jewish background is vital to understanding Paul, so also an acquaintance with his Greco-Roman foreground is indispensable to understand the situations into which Paul directed his instructions. So we move from the derivation to the direction of Paul's teaching, from where Paul was coming from to what Paul was looking at, from background to foreground. This is not to suggest that in numerous cases the opposite realities may also be observed, namely that Paul's thinking has been significantly influenced by his Greco-Roman context, or that the issues he addresses in his churches were generated out of Jewish influences and alternative interpretations of Scripture. In Paul's writings in general, however, and in 1 Corinthians in particular, Old Testament and Jewish backgrounds provide the primary sources for Paul's thought and teaching, while the Greco-Roman world provides the context for their application.

Here we must distinguish between the social history approach, our concern in this section, and the sociological approach (see the next section) to the study of early Christianity. There is some overlap between these concerns. They are both interested in the question, "What are the social facts of life characteristic of the world to which the New Testament belongs?"<sup>122</sup> They are both committed to the study of Paul's letters not just as a history of ideas, but as "a history of communities."<sup>123</sup> To risk a generalization, the former involves historical-descriptive work using the insights of the ancient historian and the classicist; the latter consists of analytical study, utilizing sociological models and tools.<sup>124</sup>

Work which places Paul, his letters, and their readers in their literary, cultural, and social environment is a growing industry.<sup>125</sup> Edwin Judge, a

121. On the subject of "Scriptural Influence through Jewish Moral Teaching" see Rosner, *Paul, Scripture, and Ethics*, ch. 2.

122. E. A. Judge, "The Social Identity of the First Christians: A Question of Method in Religious History," *Journal of Religious History* (1980), 210.

123. The latter expression is from Wayne A. Meeks, "Understanding Early Christian Ethics," *JBL* 105.1 (1986), 3.

124. On these distinctions see Andrew D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* (AGAJU 18; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 3-7.

125. For surveys of such work, see E. A. Judge, "St. Paul and Classical Society," *JAC* 15 (1972), 19-36; idem, "Antike und Christentum: Towards a Definition of the Field: A Bibliographic Survey," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, vol. 2, 23.1 (ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1979]), 3-58; idem, "Gesellschaft und Christentum: Alte Kirche," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1984), 12:764-69;

pioneer of this approach, argues correctly that New Testament scholars ought not to “incestuously concentrate all their time on their few texts, when there is a magnificent array of contextual material all around their texts, increasing rapidly every year.”<sup>126</sup> When we read of law courts, brothels, and meat markets, or conventions of friendship and enmity, or styles of secular leadership in 1 Corinthians, for example, it is vital that we do not assume that the same institutions or social conditions that exist in our culture appear in first-century Corinth. An understanding of these is critical to seeing what Paul was looking at when he wrote 1 Corinthians.

### 3. *The Social Sciences*

As Malherbe has correctly observed about Paul’s missionary practice: “Rather than simply organize a church, Paul founded, shaped and nurtured a community.”<sup>127</sup> That social factors are important to understanding Paul’s letters goes without question. 1 Corinthians is not written to individuals but to a group. What it means to be a member of that group, the group boundaries, and the question of how to relate to outsiders are questions that are central to the situation that gave rise to the letter and to Paul’s instructions. The increasing recognition that the New Testament is set within a social matrix and that the New Testament documents have a social dimension has led to the use of the social sciences in their study. Social scientific criticism “studies the text as both a reflection of and a response to the social and cultural settings in which the text was produced.”<sup>128</sup>

Some sociological studies of the New Testament get carried away. The challenge for the sociological approach is to avoid uncontrolled and overly speculative projections, take careful note of clues to the answers to their questions that the epistles themselves contain, try not to explain too much in terms of social factors (the New Testament documents are first and foremost religious/theological documents), somehow be aware of the dangers of imposing social models which were developed to explain cultures far removed from the first-century Greco-Roman world, and to build upon the hard work of historical description (see the previous section: Greco-Roman Foreground). When seen as complementing rather than substituting the historical, exegetical, and theological methods, the socio-

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and idem, “Gesellschaft: Neues Testament,” in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, 12:769-73. Cf. also A. J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 1-59.

126. A comment published in B. J. Malina, *The Gospel of John in Sociolinguistic Perspective: Protocol of the Forty-eighth Colloquy*, 11 March 1984 (Berkeley, CA: Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 1985), 51 (cited in Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*, 5-6).

127. A. J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 1.

128. John H. Elliot, *What Is Social-Scientific Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 8.

logical approach has a definite contribution to make to a study of 1 Corinthians.<sup>129</sup> At the very least the questions they pose are often valid and insightful. Such studies occasionally inform our study of the letter but are not a primary focus.

#### 4. *Classical Rhetoric*

Whereas rhetoric may refer to the art of persuasion in general, by classical rhetoric we mean the categories reflected in the classical orators and in the ancient handbooks on rhetoric. The application of these categories to exegesis of parts of the New Testament, including 1 Corinthians, is a growing industry. Ben Witherington states the key assumption of this approach: "Paul chose to cast his letters in rhetorical forms, that is, he shaped them in accordance with formal oral speech, using rhetorical elements recognizable as such by his addressees."<sup>130</sup> In Paul's day rhetoric was the primary discipline in Roman higher education, and towns like Tarsus, Corinth, and even Jerusalem would have been exposed to rhetors on a regular basis. Since reading was done aloud, it is argued that it would not be surprising if letters of educated individuals like Paul showed some points of contact with the conventions of rhetoric, which, strictly speaking, pertained to oral speech. The argument goes that although Paul distances himself from "eloquence or human wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:1) as a means of preaching the gospel, perhaps referring to sophistic rhetoric which stressed style over substance, he nonetheless used a good deal of rhetoric to arouse the emotions and change the mind and behavior of the Corinthian church.

There were three main types of rhetoric in the first century: (1) deliberative rhetoric, which grew up in the democratic assemblies of the cities and was future oriented, was the art of persuasion or dissuasion; (2) forensic rhetoric, which came from the law courts, focused on the past and was concerned with accusations and defense; and (3) epideictic rhetoric, often used in funeral oratory or public speeches and usually focused on the present, was taken up with giving praise or blame to secure agreement with or rejection of some value.

According to Witherington, 1 Corinthians is deliberative rhetoric with a semiforensic aside in chapter 9 and an epideictic character to chapter

129. For discussion and evaluation of the method from a practitioner's viewpoint see Bengt Holmberg, *Sociology and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), or Howard Clark Kee, *Knowing the Truth: A Sociological Approach to New Testament Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989). Daniel J. Harrington has provided a helpful bibliography covering approximately twenty years of books and articles in "Sociological Concepts and the Early Church: A Decade of Research," *Theological Studies* 41 (1980), 181-90; and "Second Testament Exegesis and the Social Sciences: A Bibliography," *BTB* 18 (1988), 77-85. With reference to 1 Corinthians, see the bibliography in Witherington, 61-65.

130. Witherington, 39. In the following description of rhetoric I am indebted to Witherington's discussion, 39-48.

13.<sup>131</sup> Another attempt at rhetorical analysis of 1 Corinthians is Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*.<sup>132</sup> Mitchell believes that in the light of the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition 1 Corinthians turns out to be not parenesis, which she defines as general moral exhortation, but deliberative rhetoric, containing advice about specific matters and incidents. The thesis of her book is that 1 Corinthians is a single letter, not a combination of fragments, the overriding aim of which was to persuade the Corinthian Christians to become unified.

The key question in assessing such studies is, Was 1 Corinthians written in conformity with Greco-Roman rhetoric? What has Aristotle to do with Paul?<sup>133</sup> Three points qualify a positive reply to this question and warn against too rigid an application of the categories. First, the ancient rhetorical handbooks are not concerned with letters, except with respect to stylistic matters.<sup>134</sup> Secondly, and more importantly, the language appropriate to rhetoric in the ancient world is by and large not to be found in 1 Corinthians. Whereas scholars disagree as to how to characterize the Greek of the New Testament, both options, that it is heavily influenced by Semitisms and the Septuagint and that it resembles the common Greek of the papyri, remove it from the realm of oratory.<sup>135</sup> A third and related point is that from the church fathers to the Reformation, Christian teachers as diverse as Origen and Melancthon, some of whom were accomplished rhetors, found Paul's style to be forceful but not artistic. They did not find in his letters the evidence of an advanced classical education. These writers often refer to 1 Corinthians 1–2 as indicating that Paul did not see himself as writing literature in the sense of rhetoric. Arguing against Celsus, the Fathers concede the point that Paul's letters do not follow the recognized means of public discourse.<sup>136</sup>

Thus, methodological difficulties in defining rhetoric in relation to letters, the language Paul used, and the judgment of early interpreters who knew classical rhetoric weigh against the hypothesis that 1 Corinthians is rhetoric in the formal sense.<sup>137</sup> We shall not adopt classical rhetoric as the interpretive strategy of this commentary. Nonetheless, such studies can still

131. Witherington, 46. 2 Corinthians is seen as forensic rhetoric, Paul's defense of his ministry, with a major deliberative digression in 6:14–7:1. 2 Corinthians 8–9 has a deliberative form within the larger forensic purpose of the letter.

132. M. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*. The book is a revised doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Hans Dieter Betz at the University of Chicago.

133. Cf. the title of Steve Walton, "What Has Aristotle to Do with Paul? Rhetorical Criticism and 1 Thessalonians," *TynBul* 46.2 (1995), 229–50.

134. Stanley E. Porter, "Rhetorical Categories in Pauline Literature," in Stanley E. Porter and Thoman H. Olbricht, *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 122.

135. See Philip H. Kern, *Rhetoric and Galatians: Assessing an Approach to Paul's Epistle* (SNTSMS 101; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), ch. 6.

136. See Kern, *Rhetoric and Galatians*, ch. 5.

137. Obviously 1 Corinthians is rhetoric if rhetoric is defined as the universal phenomenon of persuasive communication.

be read with profit for their insights into how 1 Corinthians achieves its purposes and for the structure of the letter.<sup>138</sup>

### **5. Theology and Exposition**

One of the purposes of a Pillar commentary is to ask not just what the text meant in the first century, but what it means today. To many readers this may seem to be so obviously the task of the Christian commentator that it need not be said. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Since the Enlightenment, commentators on books of the Bible have seen their primary, if not their sole, responsibility to be understanding the text in its original historical setting. This also has tended to be true for evangelical commentators. However, biblical scholars are increasingly seeing the need to go beyond historical exegesis toward a theological understanding of the text, both in its original context and in the contemporary scene. Furthermore, coming from the other side, some expositions have appeared that are based on thorough exegesis and have much to offer in regard to apprehending the contemporary significance of the text.

Seeing the contemporary significance of the text as lying within the remit of the biblical commentator is now more widely accepted. Indeed, J. L. Houlden argues that Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical work recommends "an approach which abandons the uncommitted neutrality of the historian and reintroduces faith into the process of apprehending the text."<sup>139</sup> Houlden goes on to say: "The Christian interpreter is foolish to come to the New Testament as if with one hand tied behind his back."<sup>140</sup> With this freedom in mind we have endeavored to write a commentary that has an interest both in history and in the usefulness, power, and authority of the text as God's word. However, this goal does not find expression in separate sections on preaching or application. Instead we aim throughout to offer a Christian theological interpretation of the letter that at the same time takes its historical and literary dimensions seriously.

### **E. Some Features of This Commentary**

A brief orientation to the commentary itself will assist in reading it, and the letter, with profit. Here we will deal with four features: (1) the use of Greek and the question of verbal aspect; (2) the general format of major sections; (3) the value of 1 Corinthians as Christian Scripture in the twenty-first cen-

138. For an annotated bibliography up to 1992 see Witherington, 55-61.

139. J. L. Houlden, "Commentary (NT)," in R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (eds.), *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London: SCM/Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 131.

140. Houlden, "Commentary (NT)," 131.

tury; and (4) what we believe to be our distinctive contribution to the study of the letter.

### 1. *The Use of Greek and the Question of Verbal Aspect*

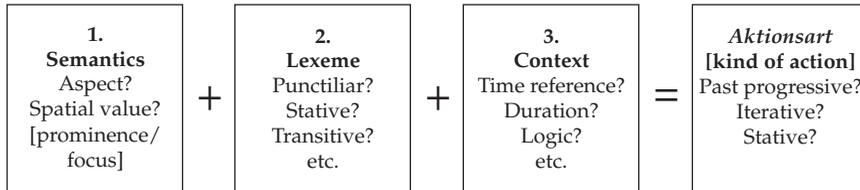
The past few decades have seen a revolution in the development of linguistic sophistication in the understanding of Hellenistic Greek. Such developments are still in progress, and many issues are more highly debated today than ever before. One of the main results of all these studies is that many of the assertions that were previously made regarding the significance of the usage of a particular tense are now considered highly suspect or completely unfounded (especially with subjunctives, imperatives, and infinitives, but also, to a lesser degree, with indicative verbs).<sup>141</sup>

It used to be common for New Testament scholars to make strong assertions about aorist verbs being “punctiliar,” present tense verbs being “continuous,” and perfect tense verbs communicating both a punctiliar past event and a continuous present consequence or outcome from that event. All of these ideas have been discredited to one degree or another by more recent careful linguistic analysis. Scholars also used to easily assert that a particular verb was iterative, gnomic, conative, ingressive, and so on, often giving the impression that such things were to be simply (and authoritatively) intuited, or chosen according to the needs of one’s preferred interpretation. The impression was often given that the tenses themselves communicated these various kinds of meaning. Recent linguistic analysis has led to much more nuanced understandings of how verbs and verb phrases (verbs in conjunction with adverbs, prepositions, objects, etc.) function as well as more distinct consideration of the information that is communicated by a verb’s tense form versus its lexical form and context.

Con Campbell has recently published an accessible introduction to verbal aspect in biblical Greek with a helpful approach to understanding the interactions between verbal and lexical aspect which relates perfective and imperfective verbal aspect to lexical aspect as marked especially by the

<sup>141</sup> See Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood* (Studies in Biblical Greek 1; New York: Peter Lang, 1989); Buist M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson, eds., *Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics: Open Questions in Current Research* (JSNTSup 80; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); K. L. McKay, *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek: An Aspectual Approach* (Studies in Biblical Greek 5; New York: Peter Lang, 1994); Mari Broman Olsen, *A Semantic and Pragmatic Model of Lexical and Grammatical Aspect* (New York: Garland, 1997); Constantine R. Campbell, *Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative: Soundings in the Greek of the New Testament* (Studies in Biblical Greek 13; New York: Peter Lang, 2007); idem, *Verbal Aspect and Non-Indicative Verbs: Further Soundings in the Greek of the New Testament* (New York: P. Lang, 2009). For a very clear and accessible introduction to the subject see Constantine R. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

issues of durativity (he calls verbs that lack durativity “punctiliar” and those that do not “stative”) and transitivity (the difference between transitive verbs which take objects and intransitive verbs which do not). Campbell elegantly depicts the elements that inform *Aktionsart*, or the various kinds of action portrayed through Greek verbs, with the following chart:<sup>142</sup>



For example, an imperfective verb form/tense (e.g., present or imperfect) used in conjunction with a lexeme that is not punctiliar (e.g., an activity or accomplishment verb), in a context that refers to a specific ongoing case or situation (or that “allows progression”), suggests progressive *Aktionsart* (kind of action), for example, Galatians 1:14 — “I was advancing in Judaism.”<sup>143</sup> On the other hand, an imperfective verb form/tense (e.g., present or imperfect) used in conjunction with a lexeme that is punctiliar (e.g., an achievement verb), in a context that allows for or requires repetition, suggests iterative (repetitive) *Aktionsart* (kind of action), for example, Matthew 17:15 “he often falls into the fire.”<sup>144</sup> For just one more example, a perfective verb form/tense (e.g., aorist) used in conjunction with a lexeme that is punctiliar (e.g., an achievement verb), in a context that allows for or requires punctiliarity, suggests punctiliar ([near] instantaneous) *Aktionsart* (kind of action), for example, Mark 5:27: a woman “touched his robe.”<sup>145</sup>

Scholars have not been wrong to see punctiliar, continuous, iterative, gnomic, conative, or ingressive ideas in their texts.<sup>146</sup> They have been wrong to think that the verbal tenses themselves express such distinct ideas. These particular kinds of actions (referred to as “*Aktionsart*”) are not expressed by the verbal tenses themselves but through a combination of verbal aspect (imperfective, perfective, or perhaps stative), lexical aspect (a particular verb is stative or punctiliar, telic or atelic, transitive or intransitive), and other contextual features (adverbs, prepositional or other modifiers, etc.). Certain verb tenses (verbal aspects) combine naturally with the meanings of particular verbs (lexical aspect and meaning) to express certain kinds of ac-

142. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, 67. See how he relates this to the various tense-forms on pp. 67-132.

143. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, 68.

144. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, 69.

145. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, 99.

146. For clear and helpful discussions of these and other categories of tense usage see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 495-586.

tion. Perfective and imperfective aspects (not to mention the possible category of stative aspect) interact differently with states, activities, achievements, and accomplishments (that is, with different combinations of the presence or lack of durativity and telicity) and with various temporal or circumstantial contexts in ways which were presumably felt to be intuitive and natural to ancient Greeks but which have eluded nonnative readers of Greek for centuries and are only now beginning to be recognized.

More controversial is the argument made by some that the Greek language lacks tense (not tense forms) in the sense that certain tenses (in the indicative mood) mean past, present, or future time. The number of apparent exceptions to the expected temporal significance of the verbs has been seen as an argument against the idea that tenses per se ever have any temporal significance. If time were of the essence of the tense forms, temporal significance would not be cancelable (it would always be present), but that is clearly not the case. It has been suggested that temporal relationships are not communicated by verb tenses but through other deictic (contextual) indicators, such as adverbs and other temporal references in the context. Still it is usually admitted that although time may not be the essence of any of the tenses (except perhaps the future tense), a default temporal understanding is assumed except where it is clearly cancelled by some contextual indicators. It is probably in light of these default temporal significances that both ancient and modern Greeks have unanimously affirmed that temporal significance is normally communicated by Greek verbs.<sup>147</sup>

As we have written this commentary, we have kept in mind readers who lack any significant knowledge of Greek and have kept any significant discussion of Greek to the footnotes. We spend significant time on lexicography (careful examination of word meanings) and address issues of grammar and syntax in occasional footnotes. With respect to grammar we have followed recent developments in Greek verbal aspect and have sought to avoid the naïve comments about tense and aspect that can be found in many previous commentaries on 1 Corinthians (as well as other letters). If the commentary has fewer comments on the significance of the tense of a particular Greek verb, it is not due to unfamiliarity with the latest discussions but rather due to our commitment to avoid making exegetical choices dependent upon questionable linguistic grounds.<sup>148</sup>

For example, we try to avoid making unsupported exegetical distinc-

147. Ancient Greek authors who commented on the temporal significance of Greek verbs include Plato, *Parmenides* 141d-e; Aristotle, *Poetics* 1457a; *On Interpretation* 16b.6-9, 16-18; 19b.13-14 (cf. 18b.10-15); Chrysippus, *Fragmenta Logica et Physica* 165.2-4; scholia attributed to Stephanos, *Scholía Vaticana* 250.26-31; 251.9-14; Dionysius Thrax, *Ars Grammatica* 1.1.46.4-5; 1.1.53.1-3; Plutarch, *De Communibus Notitiis adversus Stoicos* 1082.A-D. See also the discussion in C. C. Caragounis, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 316-36.

148. Even some of the most recent commentaries make some comments about aspect that are now thought to be suspect.

tions between present and aorist subjunctive or imperative verbs. Of the ninety-nine imperatives in 1 Corinthians all but fourteen are present imperatives (the fourteen aorist imperatives may be found in 3:18; 5:7, 13; 6:20; 7:9, 11, 21; 10:15; 11:6, 13; 15:34; 16:1, 11, 20). In his recent study of the verbal aspect of nonindicative verbs Con Campbell points out that while aorist imperatives are usually used for "specific instruction, which is instruction that is relevant to a specific situation," and present imperatives are used for "general instruction, or instruction that is relevant to situations in general,"<sup>149</sup> we sometimes find summary aorist imperatives where we would expect a present imperative and it is difficult to demonstrate "any meaningful difference" between them.<sup>150</sup> Most of Paul's uses of the aorist imperative in 1 Corinthians may be explained on the assumption that he has a particular case or situation in mind (5:7, 13; 10:15; 11:13; 15:34; 16:1, 11, 20) or that he hypothesizes about a potential specific case or situation (perhaps in 3:18; 7:9, 21; 11:6), but we would not claim that these explanations are certain, and they do not seem to cover all of the examples (see 6:20 and 7:11; in the latter case we have a present imperative and an aorist imperative side by side).

Scholars have not been able to agree on how the perfect tense fits within the system of verbal aspect in Hellenistic Greek.<sup>151</sup> Stanley Porter and K. L. McKay have argued that the perfect and pluperfect tense forms represent a third aspect (besides the perfective and imperfective aspects), namely stative aspect, which presents not an action but a state of affairs. Since a distinction between perfective and imperfective aspect is common to many languages but stative aspect is not, this last category, and the significance of the perfect tense in general, has proven controversial. Buist Fanning has argued the perfect tense expresses perfective aspect, present temporal reference, and stative *Aktionsart*. Mari Broman Olsen has argued that the Greek perfect tense expresses present tense with perfective aspect. Her analysis comes very close to the traditional understanding of the perfect tense, as pointing to a past event which has continuing results or present relevance, although along with other recent studies on Greek verbal aspect she emphasizes that the perfect tense stresses the present situation.<sup>152</sup> Con Campbell argues that the perfect tense expresses imperfective aspect and "heightened proximity," which corresponds to heightened prominence.<sup>153</sup> Studies of the perfect tense forms are complicated by the fact that the perfect tense began to be used as the equivalent to the aorist.<sup>154</sup> Whether the perfect tense points to a present state due to belonging to a stative aspectual category (as argued by Porter and McKay) or by way of expressing

149. Campbell, *Verbal Aspect and Non-Indicative Verbs*, 100.

150. Campbell, *Verbal Aspect and Non-Indicative Verbs*, 88 (see 81-88).

151. We will not discuss the pluperfect tense since it does not appear in 1 Corinthians.

152. M. D. Olsen, *A Semantic and Pragmatic Model of Lexical and Grammatical Aspect*, 232-34.

153. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect*, 51-53.

154. Cf. Caragounis, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament*, 110-12.

a particular kind of action (*Aktionsart*) often implicated by that tense (and whether it is a reflection of an imperfective aspect [as Campbell argues] or perfective aspect and present tense [as argued by Olsen]), it most often stresses a present state of affairs. We will give a bit more attention to some of the perfect tense verbs in the commentary than others because we think there is often a greater (and previously misunderstood) exegetical significance to them than to some of the other aspectual distinctions.

## 2. The Format of Major Sections

While the commentary seeks to address major exegetical problems in the letter, such as the meaning of “baptism for the dead” (15:29), we have not written it as a work of reference in which to “dip” at will. As much as in any of Paul’s letters, in 1 Corinthians the meaning of individual verses can only be grasped in terms of their place in larger units of thought. To use a metaphor, you need both a map and orientation before setting out on any journey of discovery. To this end we have given detailed outlines for this commentary (see the Contents, pp. v-xiii, as well as the headings themselves), and we open each section with an introduction that sets the stage for a compelling reading of the verses that follow.

The introductory paragraphs to larger units follow a general pattern. These each concern some level of context, whether historical, theological, or literary, and generally cover some aspects of: (1) the situation in Corinth, along with tentative reconstruction of what Paul heard or read of the Corinthians; (2) the biblical and Jewish foundations of Paul’s response; (3) main problems of interpretation to be solved; (4) the passage’s value to theology and ethics; and (5) its argument and structure.

Reading Paul’s letters is like listening to one end of a telephone conversation; unfortunately we are left to guess what the party on the other end of the line is saying. The strategy of “mirror reading” is especially pertinent to the interpretation of 1 Corinthians. In each section attentive readers gain from Paul’s responses some sense of what had been said and was going on in Corinth. Read this way, the letter is far from dry moral and religious discourse; on the contrary, it is a vibrant conversation. It is possible to speculate too much about the situation in Corinth,<sup>155</sup> but the English versions give a starting point by indicating where Paul is likely quoting the Corinthians, as in 1:12, “I follow Apollos”; 6:12, “I have the right to do anything”; 7:1, “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman”; and 8:1, “We all possess knowledge.” Our own understanding of the other side of the conversation, that is, what the Corinthians were doing,

155. See John M. G. Barclay, “Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case,” *JNT* 31 (1987), 73-93, on the necessary cautions to avoid an uncontrolled mirror reading of an ancient document like 1 Corinthians.

thinking, and saying, is offered at the very beginning of each unit (see 1 in the previous paragraph).

As already indicated, we are convinced that 1 Corinthians is best read in the context of the Testament that precedes it. It is no accident that the two parts of Scripture are usually bound together in one "Holy Bible." We agree with Dietrich Bonhoeffer when he wrote: "It is not Christian to want to take our thoughts and feelings too quickly and too directly from the New Testament. . . . One cannot and must not speak the ultimate word before the penultimate."<sup>156</sup> Paul's scriptural and Jewish inheritance is the foundation upon which his teaching is usually built, and it serves our interpretation to make some general comments concerning this foundation before proceeding to inspect what Paul has built upon it (see 2 above).

We have sought in the commentary not to allow the difficulties of exegesis to obscure a positive exposition. Nonetheless, it is useful to offer some guidance as to the bigger questions that need to be answered in this regard, an orientation that may be of assistance to those using the commentary as a textbook in a setting of formal instruction (see 3 above). This material would form a good resource for student assignments and class discussions, whether or not the instructor agrees entirely with our solutions. Likewise, some preview of the passage's argument and structure will encourage a reading that places it in its proper literary context (see 5 above).

Finally, a desire to read 1 Corinthians as Christian Scripture is acknowledged in a few comments on the usefulness of the passage in question to Christian theology, preaching, and ethics (see 4 above). It is our conviction that much more can be done than is possible in a commentary format. Hopefully, our biblical-theological approach will help point the way.

### 3. *The Value of 1 Corinthians*

Two distinctive benefits of the letter to the contemporary church may be highlighted. Along with its considerable and widely acknowledged contributions to biblical theology in the doctrines of God, Christology, eschatology, salvation history, and so on, 1 Corinthians has much to offer to *Christian ethics* and to a Christian response to *postmodernity*. Even if the commentary can only "scratch the surface" in developing these two areas, both have great promise and potential for anyone reading the letter and commentary with them in mind.

Whereas much of the ethical reflection in the New Testament is piecemeal and incidental, 1 Corinthians showcases wide-ranging treatments of moral issues that are rigorous and reflective. In the first place, the letter

156. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: SCM, 1953), 157. The example he gives is that "It is only when one knows the unutterability of the name of God that one can utter the name of Jesus Christ."

provides a much needed remedy to a simplistic “divine command theory” of ethics (deontology), the view that Christian practices are mere arbitrary impositions forced upon us by the power of God’s will without any connection to the structures of God’s world or the impact of his salvation. In 1 Corinthians, to use a metaphor, whereas Paul does take “the high moral ground” on some issues (e.g., incest in ch. 5) and issues uncompromising directives, on others he acknowledges “the valleys” of personal preference (e.g., frequency of sex in marriage) and “the slopes” where Christians may legitimately differ from each other (e.g., on some aspects of eating food sacrificed to idols dealt with in chs. 8–10). Readers do well to notice not just the content of Paul’s instructions but the way he arrives at moral decisions and the level of freedom he allows to the conscience of the individual.

Paul’s letter also exemplifies the implications for ethics of not just what it is to speak, but also what it is to act. If Thiselton’s commentary draws attention to “speech-acts” in 1 Corinthians, we wish to note too the prevalence of what might be called “act-speeches.” As Nicholas Wolterstorff observes, “[t]he media we use for saying things extend far beyond words. . . . One doesn’t need words to say things.”<sup>157</sup> Paul is well aware of this, and explains to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians that “you yourselves are our letter, . . . known and read by everyone. . . . a letter from Christ” (2 Cor. 3:2-3). 1 Corinthians is replete with act-speeches, both human and divine. Paul chastises the Corinthians for behavior that slanders the reputation of God and sums up God’s salvation in terms of what the death of Jesus says to and about the world. When the Corinthians eat and drink the Lord’s Supper, they “proclaim the Lord’s death” (11:26). Corinthian boasting denies God’s grace, their insensitivity to each other’s needs contradicts the fact that they are one body, and so on. In response, Paul points out that the cross, God’s action in choosing the weak in Corinth, and Paul’s own humble demeanor announce something about such matters as human wisdom and strength. The letter underscores the profound unity of words and behavior in divine and human action.

1 Corinthians also models a Christian ethics that is fully integrated with Christian theology, specifically an apocalyptic theology of the cross that proclaims the end of the world as we know it. If Paul’s role is that of an end-time herald (1:17), his proclamation declares the end of the world’s puny power (1:18-25), arrogant boasting (1:26-31), fancy talk (2:1-5), and shallow wisdom (2:6-16), and of human pride (4:1-7) and meaningless suffering (4:8-17). He affirms that the Corinthian Christians belong to a new world (3:1-9, 16-23) in which there is accountability instead of autonomy (4:18–5:13), righteous suffering instead of self-assertion (6:1-11), sexual purity instead of self-indulgence (6:12-20), mutual love instead of selfishness (7:1-7), reconciliation instead of strife (7:8-16), being known instead of knowing (8:1-6), gospel re-

157. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 38.

sponsibilities instead of personal rights (8:7–9:23), restraint instead of self-destruction (9:24–11:1), promotion of honor rather than shame (11:2–34), unifying interdependence instead of divisions and alienation (12:1–31), the supremacy of love instead of the love of supremacy (13:1–13), and more. Without climbing the “ladder of abstraction” very far, and without leaving the theology of 1 Corinthians behind, we can see the whole letter as a direct contribution to a positive and practical Christian ethics and worldview.

Although 1 Corinthians is a letter from the first century, there are significant parallels between the situation Paul confronted there and challenges of postmodernity in our world today such that this letter may contribute to a Christian response to postmodernity.<sup>158</sup> Anthony Thiselton has described the Corinthians’ “ever-ready move away from shared tradition and a tendency to elevate the self-constructed perceptions of peer groups above more rational reflection as anticipating a ‘postmodern’ mood”:

Although premodern Corinth never passed through “modernity,” Paul’s respect for classical, rational argument alongside his acute awareness of the molding power of the cross and the Holy Spirit stood in contrast to the seductions of more fragmented peer-group pressures experienced by many at Corinth. To them Paul re-proclaims the non-competitive gift of grace, the humbling “reversals” of the cross, and respect for the otherness of “the other” within a dialectic of ordered difference and unity. In so doing, he speaks powerfully to the world of today, emphasizing as well the christological criteria of “spirituality,” love for the other in building the whole, and the transformative promise of the resurrection of the whole person when giftedness by the Holy Spirit will become unhindered, transparent, and complete.<sup>159</sup>

Although postmodernism recognizes the role of narratives as hermeneutical frameworks, it rejects the possibility of a meta-narrative, an overarching, universally valid, global story or schema which serves to explain or organize human knowledge and experience. Rather, innumerable local narratives (which are not likely to be reconcilable), developed within and sustained by each community or society, are thought to provide the basis for the social construction of individual and group identities and the hermeneutical reference point for the interpretation of texts and experiences.<sup>160</sup> Thiselton highlights the relevant parallel: “To the degree to which Corinthian Christians imbibed secular Corinthian culture with an emphasis on peer groups and *local* value systems, the church had indeed become embroiled in what we have termed a *postmodern pragmatism of the market*

158. Cf. Thiselton, 14: “Corinthian culture has much in common with the social constructivism, competitive pragmatism, and radical pluralism which characterizes so-called postmodernity as a popular mood.”

159. Thiselton, xviii.

160. Thiselton, 16, refers to “celebrations over the demise of a transcontextual rationality in favor of ‘local,’ social constructions of truth” (emphasis removed).

with its related *devaluation of truth, tradition, rationality, and universals*.<sup>161</sup> He refers to a “postmodern mood” in Corinth which “entailed the priority of the local over traditions of more universal currency; obsession with pragmatic success at the expense of devaluing truth; social recognition and manipulation by persuasion over against argument and rationality.”<sup>162</sup>

In 1 Corinthians Paul strongly rejects any suggestion that the Corinthians have a true understanding of personal identity based on their place within the local culture and its distinctions (especially between free and slave, elite and non-elite, Gentile and Jew, male and female, etc.; cf. 1 Cor. 7:17-19). Their identity is given to them by God and is established in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Corinthian Christians are “known by God” (8:3), an emphasis that appears more often in 1 Corinthians than in any other book in the Bible (cf. 13:12; 14:38).<sup>163</sup> They are brothers and sisters in Christ (1:10, etc.), called by God to be his holy people (1:2), saints. They are God’s eschatological temple (3:16; 6:19), children of the fathers of Israel (10:1), and much more. A significant part of the purpose of this letter is to help the Corinthians gain a better grasp of their true identity and reflect it in their behavior inside and outside the church.

This is not the outworking of just one more local narrative, but reflects what must be understood as the (imperfectly understood, but sufficiently revealed) meta-narrative composed by God himself which will reach its final climax when all of creation has been fully redeemed and restored through Christ and presented back to God the Father, who will be “all in all” once and for all (15:28). This meta-narrative rejects the idea of the ultimate autonomy of the individual (typical of modernism) as well as the hermeneutical autonomy of the community (typical of post-modernism). The God who created heaven and earth, and raised Christ from the dead, serves as the fundamental point of reference for our understanding of ourselves and of our world and our roles within it, and all of life is received and lived at his pleasure. Paul draws out some of the radical implications. It entails “placing the community as a whole under the criterion and identity of the cross of Christ,” where “a reversal of value systems occurs (cf. 1:26-31), and as recipients of the sheer gift of divine grace through the cross, all stand on the same footing (cf. 4:7).”<sup>164</sup>

Paul’s several references to “the churches” in 1 Corinthians all reinforce

161. Thiselton, 33 (his emphasis). “With today’s ‘postmodern’ mood we may compare the self-sufficient, self-congratulatory culture of Corinth coupled with an obsession about peer-group prestige, success in competition, their devaluing of tradition and universals, and near contempt for those without standing in some chosen value system. All this provides an embarrassingly close model of a postmodern context for the gospel in our own times, even given the huge historical differences and distances in so many other respects” (16-17, emphasis removed).

162. Thiselton, 41.

163. See Rosner, “Known by God: The Meaning and Value of a Neglected Theme,” *TynBul* 59 (2008): 207-30.

164. Thiselton, 33-34 (emphasis removed).

the fact that the Corinthians must not think of themselves as a local Christian community free to construct its own identity through some eclectic mix of elements of Pauline and Corinthian origin. In 1:17 he refers to “the rule I lay down in all the churches.” In 11:16 he points out that “the churches of God” have no other practice than the one Paul has established in Corinth as well. The experience and practice of the other churches ground Paul’s directives for Corinth again in 14:33, and in 16:1 the Corinthians are told to follow the example of the churches of Galatia. These are foundational for the concept of the catholicity of the church, which is to glorify God “in every place” (1 Cor. 1:2; Mal. 1:11). As Thiselton points out, “Whether a given local group genuinely reflects Christ and the apostolic gospel is not left to be determined by *criteria internal to the group in question*, but also relates to translocal counterchecks such as the *apostles*, Paul’s *fellow workers*, and creeds, practices, and traditions followed *in all the churches*.” This, as he points out, “brings us to the heart of the global debate about so-called *postmodernity*.”<sup>165</sup>

The other-focused wisdom and love based in the cross of Christ also serve as the appropriate foundation for a proper hermeneutic and for healthy human relationships. As Kevin Vanhoozer argues, “The Golden Rule, for hermeneutics and ethics alike, is to treat significant others — texts, persons, God — with love and respect.”<sup>166</sup> Thiselton grants some truth to the perception of postmodern philosophers (which he sees also in Paul) “that virtually every action and stance bears some relationship to the power interests of the self, or to one’s peer group.” However, only genuine love, such as that expounded by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13, “decenters the power ‘interests’ of the self and of its peer group, and in recentering them in the Other (primarily in God, but also in the other person) disengages from self-interest.” Only in such a context “can truth emerge as disengaged from a power agenda. . . . True disinterested integrity is free to seek truth, without anxiety about what it helps or hinders in one’s personal agenda.”<sup>167</sup>

Paul’s application of the gospel message to the problems of the Corinthian church provides us with considerable assets for appropriating the resources and responding to the challenges of postmodern perspectives and concerns today. It provides insight into the actual source of our true identity and role in the divinely revealed meta-narrative that leads to glory for us as well as for Christ and God the Father (2:7; 15:25-28, 43). In the cross, and the love which it demonstrates and models for us, the letter reveals a different approach to the use of power, one that leads to the sacrifice of one’s own desires and preferences out of a commitment to the well-being of others. This radical and upside-down use of power speaks powerfully to postmodern concerns (as it does to those of any other culture or philosophy).

165. Thiselton, 75 (his emphases).

166. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 32.

167. Thiselton, 1055 (emphases removed). See also the comments on the relevance of 1 Corinthians for a Christian response to postmodernity in Thiselton, 548, 773.

#### 4. *A Biblical/Jewish Approach to the Letter*

What does the approach advocated in the introduction to this commentary contribute to the study of 1 Corinthians? We believe that it helps at both the “big picture” level and at the micro-level of exegesis. Major themes of Paul’s theology in the letter have already been treated in earlier sections of this introduction (see esp. II.D., II.E., II.B., II.C.). Rather than attempt to summarize the theology of the letter any further, we shall draw attention to a few ways in which we believe our approach affects the interpretation of Paul and his letter.

As we have tried to show in this introduction, a biblical/Jewish approach provides a solid basis for appreciating the structure and coherence of Paul’s response to Corinthian problems and also does greater justice to the fundamentally Jewish character of Paul’s response to the Corinthians. The letter is not an *ad hoc* reply to a series of distinct problems treated randomly or even in the order in which they had come to Paul’s attention. The order is most likely Paul’s own, one to which he is drawn, perhaps instinctively, as the similar thought patterns evident in Romans 1:21-28, 15:5-16 and 1 Thesalonians 1:9-10 attest. 1 Corinthians is effectively an early Christian reformulation of the traditional Jewish approach to dealing with sexual immorality and idolatry along with expectations associated with the eschatological conversion of Gentiles. And while unity is clearly a significant issue, Paul’s most fundamental concern is not with unity itself, but with the glory of God, that is, that the church in Corinth might reflect the ultimate goal, “that God may be all in all” (15:28).

The “Paul” that emerges from reading the letter turns out not to be random and inconsistent, as is often thought. Instead, he is a man focused on an impossible mission, to proclaim the message of the lordship of Christ to the glory of God throughout the entire world. He acts out of a secure and noble identity, intent on fulfilling his priestly duty to ensure the purity of God’s temple, which is the new humanity that is being transformed and renewed by God.

How then should we read 1 Corinthians? Rather than settle for seeing the letter merely as Paul’s response to oral and written reports of problems in the Corinthian church such as disunity, incest, lawsuits, and prostitution, we are convinced that an approach that takes full account of its biblical and Jewish roots is preferable. In this light, 1 Corinthians is:

*Paul’s attempt to tell the church of God in Corinth that they are part of the fulfillment of the Old Testament expectation of worldwide worship of the God of Israel, and as God’s eschatological temple they must act in a manner appropriate to their pure and holy status by becoming unified, shunning pagan vices, and glorifying God in obedience to the lordship of Jesus Christ.*

## Commentary

### I. LETTER OPENING, 1:1-9

The opening verses of 1 Corinthians contain formal elements that are not unexpected in an ancient letter. However, these features should not be written off as merely perfunctory. Both the salutation (1:1-3) and the thanksgiving (1:4-9) are distinctive in the Pauline corpus, and together they set the stage for Paul's instructions in the ensuing sixteen chapters. Two tasks are key to discerning their function as an introduction to the rest of the letter: (1) a comparison with the openings of Paul's other letters highlights their distinctiveness; and (2) paying close attention to biblical echoes and allusions supplies clues to the biblical-theological framework that Paul is seeking to construct in his response to problems in the church in Corinth.

#### A. Salutation, 1:1-3

*<sup>1</sup>Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,*

*<sup>2</sup>To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ — their Lord and ours:*

*<sup>3</sup>Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

#### 1. The Sender(s): Paul, Apostle of Jesus Christ (and Sosthenes), 1:1

**1:1** Like most letters in Paul's day 1 Corinthians begins with a salutation consisting of the form: A (v. 1) to B (v. 2), greetings (v. 3).<sup>1</sup> In identify-

1. To B from A, greetings were also not uncommon; see Vincent Parkin, "Some Comments on the Pauline Prescripts," *IBS* 8 (1986), 92-99.

ing himself Paul draws attention to the fact that he is an *apostle*, an agent or messenger of *Christ Jesus*. This assertion appears in all of Paul's epistolary prescripts with the exception of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philippians, and Philemon. In 1 Corinthians, as in Galatians, it functions to bolster his standing in a community where at least some were questioning his authority.

Paul stresses the divine origin of his apostleship in two ways: he was *called* to be an apostle of Christ Jesus,<sup>2</sup> probably an allusion to his experience on the Damascus road; and his apostleship is *by the will of God*. It was not of his own choosing (cf. 15:5-7 and 10: "By the grace of God I am what I am"). This conviction produced in Paul a rare combination of genuine humility and supreme confidence, a profound sense of both privilege and obligation. Paul's reference to his own apostleship, if understated here, is more fully developed later in the letter. In 9:1-2 he reminds the Corinthians that their own favorable standing before God is a result of his "work in the Lord" and that they are "the seal of [his] apostleship," thus highlighting the direct relevance of Paul's status and stature for the Corinthians' ongoing spiritual life. Further, in 4:14-16 he admonishes them as their "father," another way of referring to his role as the apostolic founder of the church. And in 15:1-2 Paul explicitly reminds them that their salvation came about when Paul preached the gospel to them.

On eight occasions Paul cites others in the address of his letters, in this case *our brother Sosthenes*. Sosthenes is not mentioned elsewhere in Paul's letters. The bare reference to him here suggests that he was known to the Corinthians. It is quite possible that he is the "Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue," mentioned in Acts 18:17, who was treated roughly by the bystanders at Gallio's tribunal. Perhaps he later became a Christian and traveled to Ephesus with Paul. Why does Paul refer to Sosthenes here? It is not that he is a co-author; most of the verbs and pronouns in the letter are in the first-person singular. 1 Corinthians 16:21 implies that Paul did not write out the letter, but dictated it to someone, which was a common practice in his day.<sup>3</sup> Since greetings from those with Paul in Asia (Minor) are left until 16:19-20, Sosthenes may be Paul's amanuensis or personal secretary, although we cannot be certain.<sup>4</sup>

2. The MSS are divided over whether to read "Christ Jesus" or "Jesus Christ" (cf. KJV). The sequence varies in the MSS of many of Paul's opening salutations. Whereas the order in the formula "the (our) Lord Jesus Christ" is fixed, as in vv. 2, 3, 7, and 8, the order varies in references to the Lord by name. Even when Paul refers to the exalted Lord, as here, both sequences are found (contra Fee, 27; for "Jesus Christ" see Gal. 1:1 and many MSS of Rom. 1:1). It is a difficult textual problem to judge, but the weight of external evidence slightly favors "Christ Jesus" here. The variants draw attention to the ubiquitous presence of our Lord in the opening nine verses of the letter (no fewer than ten references in a variety of different forms).

3. See E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 60-64.

4. If Sosthenes exerted any influence on the composition of the letter, it would likely have reinforced Paul's biblical/Jewish take on the problems plaguing the Corinthian church.

**2. The Addressees: The Church in Corinth as God's Holy People under the Universal Lordship of Christ, 1:2**

**1:2** Paul writes *to the church of God in Corinth*. Since there were probably several house churches in Corinth, “[t]he singular [church]<sup>5</sup> indicates already Paul’s intention to call them to unity — they are one church, God’s church.”<sup>6</sup> They belong to God, not to any of their teachers or leaders (cf. 3:21-23). The term *church* referred to Israel as the gathered people of God in the LXX and to the public political assembly in a Greek city. Paul uses it to mean the local community of believers. The addition of “of God” to “church” is unique to 1 and 2 Corinthians in Paul’s epistolary prescripts. The words are echoed in 3:9 in further descriptions of the church in Corinth (“the field of God, the building of God”) and recall the origin of Paul’s apostleship (v. 1), which is also (by the will) of God. In apocalyptic Judaism, the equivalent Hebrew expression for *church of God* is used to refer to God’s eschatological people. Roloff suggests that the term was used by Paul “because it corresponded with the eschatological self-understanding of the Church, which understood itself to be the company elect by God and determined by him to be the center and crystallization-point of the eschatological Israel now being called into existence by him.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, when Paul designates the Corinthians *the church of God*, he is not comparing them to any other club or society in town but evokes their place in God’s cosmic plan.

Paul gives a more elaborate description of the church to which he is writing than in any of his other letters. The church in Corinth consists of *those sanctified in Christ Jesus*. They are set apart for God’s special purpose and use, just as the utensils in the Temple, the priests, and so on. They are holy, that is, a peculiar and distinctive group in Corinth. *Sanctified* here is a perfect passive participle, which, according to recent studies of verbal aspect, stresses the present state of affairs.<sup>8</sup> Thanks to Christ’s work on the cross, believers find themselves in a state of sanctification (are now sanctified), made acceptable to God (Rom. 15:16) and able to enter into and enjoy his presence.” The phrase *in Christ Jesus* refers to “their faith-union with Christ, through which they share his risen life” (cf. Acts 26:18).<sup>9</sup> Sanctification in the New Testament generally does not refer primarily to growth in

5. Gk. ἐκκλησία.

6. Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (HUT 28; Tübingen: Mohr, 1991), 192-93.

7. J. Roloff, “ἐκκλησία,” *EDNT* 1:412; cf. Roy E. Ciampa, *The Presence and Function of Scripture in Galatians 1 and 2* (WUNT 2.102; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 47.

8. Constantine Campbell’s recent work on the perfect tense would suggest that a perfect participle such as this one would be marked by greater prominence or intensity (Campbell, *Verbal Aspect and Non-Indicative Verbs* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 28-29. Whether or not Campbell’s analysis of the perfect tense is accepted, the Corinthians’ sanctified status is certainly prominent in the letter opening, given various references to them as “saints” (or “holy ones”) and those who belong to God, as well as this participle.

9. Bruce, 30.

holiness but to God's taking possession of believers.<sup>10</sup> However, those *sanctified in Christ Jesus* are intended to serve the purposes of God and his glory. Because God has sanctified them, they should worship him in holiness. In Romans 15:16, Paul describes his own apostolic ministry as "the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, *sanctified* by the Holy Spirit." It is ironic that the Corinthian Christians are thus described since in so many ways they are behaving no differently from other people in Corinth. They act as though they belong to the world rather than to God. They use secular courts, mimic the styles of secular leaders, and dine in pagan temples; to act "like mere human beings" (3:3) is to deny their sanctification.

So important is their consecrated condition that Paul states that they are *called to be his holy people*. *Hagios* in this phrase is regularly translated "holy" (cf. 16:1, "God's people"), and is one of Paul's favorite designations for all Christians (cf. 2 Cor. 1:1; Rom. 1:7; 8:27; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2). The term derives from Exodus 19:5-6, where Israel is called "a holy nation" set apart by God for himself through the events of the exodus (cf. Deut. 7:6; 26:19; Jer. 2:3). In later writings it was used more narrowly to refer to the elect within Israel who were destined to share in the blessings of the messianic kingdom (Dan. 7:18-27; *Psalms of Solomon* 17; many Qumran texts).<sup>11</sup> That they are *sanctified in Christ Jesus* is further explained in the statement that their calling is to be God's holy people. Sainthood in Paul's letters is not some elevated status reserved for a few extraordinary individuals, as regrettably in much modern usage. It refers to the sanctity of all true believers who are saints by virtue of God's call to salvation and are expected to bring him glory.

It is significant that Paul identifies the church as a singular body (*the church of God*) and then twice as a composite of individuals (*to those sanctified and called*). By referring first to the church as a whole and then collectively Paul excludes any form of individualism and one-upmanship. Although Mitchell overstates the importance of the theme of unity in the letter, it is an important theme, and as she points out, "the attempt to unite diverse individuals into a cohesive community — is thus alluded to already in the prescript."<sup>12</sup> As Paul will go on to say in 12:27, "you are the body of Christ and individually members of it."

Paul's description of the Corinthians in v. 2 mirrors elements of his self-description in v. 1. He is an *apostle by calling*; they are *holy people by calling*. He is an *apostle of Christ Jesus*; they are *sanctified in Christ Jesus*. He is an *apostle by the will of God*; they are *the church of God*. If Paul claims for himself a high station in v. 1, v. 2 accords with the Corinthians' considerable

10. Cf. David Peterson, *Possessed by God* (New Studies in Biblical Theology; Leicester: Apollos, 1995).

11. Cf. Fee, 32-33; Owen E. Evans, "New Wine in Old Skins: xiii. The Saints," *ExpTim* 86 (1975), 196-200.

12. M. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 193.

dignity and confirms his generally high opinion of them in spite of their many failings.

It is not just the Corinthian believers who are called to be saints, but they *together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ* (cf. 2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1). Paul gives them a gentle reminder that the holy people who belong to God extend far beyond their local congregation. Unity in one locality is to reflect the inherent unity of God's people everywhere. This unity is based on their common relation to the "Lord Jesus Christ," not primarily on a common creed or experience. A church that is aware of its connection to the church universal is less likely to be absorbed in its own problems.

Those who *call on the name of our Lord*, like "holy people," is another way of referring to all Christians (Acts 9:14, 21; 22:16; 2 Tim. 2:22). Those who thus call on the name of the Lord have already come to acknowledge him as the only true God, the one worthy of their worship and the source of all true hope. The Corinthian believers called upon the Lord when they believed and were saved (cf. Rom. 10:12-14), and they continue to address him in prayer and worship<sup>13</sup> and acclaim him in their meetings.<sup>14</sup>

Paul mentions that the Corinthians are united with all those who call on the name of the Lord, literally, "in every place."<sup>15</sup> A key theme in Deuteronomy is the Lord's selection of one particular place where people would call on his name (understood to refer to Jerusalem). Repeated reference is made to "the place which the LORD your God will choose to have his name called upon" (cf. Deut. 12:11, 21, 26; 14:23-24; 16:2, 6, 11; 17:8, 10; 26:2). Rather than refer to that place, however, Paul says that the Corinthians join those who call on the name of our Lord "in every place." He is the only New Testament author to use the expression (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 2:14; 1 Thess. 1:8; 1 Tim. 2:8), and he uses it to refer to the worship of God which is spreading around the world through his ministry to the Gentiles.

The expression echoes Malachi 1:11 LXX,<sup>16</sup> which (in a context of frustration over the way the Lord is being worshiped in Jerusalem) prophesies a future time when God would be worshiped by Gentiles "in every place": "From the rising of the sun until its setting my name will be glorified<sup>17</sup> among the Gentiles, and in every place<sup>18</sup> incense is offered to my name and

13. Cf. Barrett, 33.

14. Cf. Conzelmann, 23.

15. Gk. ἐν παντί τόπω.

16. The influence of the text on the New Testament is suggested by the UBS<sup>4</sup> references to it in 2 Thess. 1:12 and Rev. 15:4 (note "all nations") as also alluding to Mal. 1:11, picking up "the glorifying of God's name" language. That Paul knew and appreciated Malachi is clear from his description of the fiery judgment of God's temple in 1 Corinthians 3, which alludes to Malachi 3.

17. Gk. τὸ ὄνομά μου δεδόξασται.

18. Gk. ἐν παντί τόπω.

a pure offering, for my name is great among the Gentiles, says the Lord Almighty."<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Haggai 2:7 anticipates a time when the Gentiles will glorify God in his Temple: "all nations will come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts."

The echo of Malachi 1:11 in 1 Corinthians 1:2 suggests that the Corinthians are part of the fulfillment of God's plan to be worshiped among all the Gentiles and that it is Paul's ultimate purpose in writing to them to see them play their part in fulfilling this worldwide eschatological vision by glorifying God (see 6:20b and 10:31b). If Malachi's purpose and message was intended to help his audience "come to terms, mentally, spiritually and ethically, with the non-appearance of the new eschatological beginning"<sup>20</sup> which had been expected with the return from exile, Paul's goal in 1 Corinthians is to get the Corinthians to come to terms, mentally, spiritually and ethically, with its appearance. It is this vision of God's eschatological plan, and the Corinthians' failure to act in a way that coheres with it, that governs Paul's response to them in this letter.

The final words of v. 2, literally *theirs and ours*, could modify *everywhere* (literally, "in every place"),<sup>21</sup> which immediately precedes in the Greek, or *our Lord Jesus Christ*, as in the TNIV: *their Lord and ours*. The latter is preferable. Lightfoot explains the need for the words in connection with Paul's reference to *our Lord* earlier in v. 2 and their significance: "'Our Lord, did I say — their Lord and ours alike.' There is a covert allusion to the divisions in the Corinthian Church, and an implied exhortation to unity."<sup>22</sup> The Lord belongs to all those who call upon his name, not just to Paul and the Corinthians. Later references to "our Lord" in 1:10; 6:11; 8:6; 12:3 recall this fundamental point. *Their Lord* refers to the Lord of all those who call on his name in every place, thus suggesting the universal nature of Christ's lordship. The expectation that universal glory and worship would be given to God is at the heart of the significance of the lordship of Jesus Christ. His postcrucifixion exaltation is understood by Paul and other New Testament authors to inaugurate the long-awaited time of the universal and eternal kingdom of God which would result in every knee bowing and every tongue confessing that "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11; cf. Rev. 15:3-4).

19. Philip H. Towner, "The Pastoral Epistles," *NDBT* 333. As Andrew E. Hill, *Malachi: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 25D; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 188, notes, this perspective of Malachi is not an isolated thought: "Like his earlier contemporaries Haggai (2:7) and Zechariah (8:22), Malachi calls upon his audience to recognize that the worship of Yahweh extends universally to the nations."

20. Klaus Koch, *The Prophets*, vol. 2, *The Babylonian and Persian Periods* (trans. Margaret Kohl; London: SCM, 1983; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 179.

21. For example, Conzelmann, 23; Witherington, 80.

22. J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957; rpt., London: Macmillan, 1895), 146. Cf. Eph. 4:3, 5, "maintain the unity of the Spirit, . . . [for] there is one Lord."

### 3. The Greeting: Divine Eschatological Blessing, 1:3

1:3 Paul offers his characteristic greeting, *grace and peace*.<sup>23</sup> The standard Greek greeting literally meant “to rejoice,”<sup>24</sup> but in salutations came to mean “greetings,” as in the letter of Acts 15:23-29 and James 1:1. The most common word in Semitic formulas of greeting and farewell was *shalom*, “peace.” However, Greek papyrus letters written by Jews in Egypt and the two Greek letters from the Bar Kokhba Revolt use the Greek greeting. Paul’s greeting must have sounded very distinctive in the first century. Some Jewish letters in Aramaic added “mercy” to “peace,”<sup>25</sup> the Greek equivalent of which is a more common word in the LXX than “grace” (cf. Gal. 6:16 and 2 John 3: “grace, mercy and peace”). Paul’s *grace and peace* is probably his own creation.<sup>26</sup> The two words sum up beautifully Paul’s gospel, drawing attention to God’s beneficence and bounty, *grace*, the cause of salvation, and the well-being and welfare of those who are saved, *peace*, the outcome of salvation. As Fee observes, “the one flows out of the other.”<sup>27</sup> “When one Christian wishes grace and peace to another he prays that he may apprehend more fully the grace of God in which he already stands, and the peace he already enjoys.”<sup>28</sup> *Grace and peace* are Paul’s shorthand for the eschatological benefits that we have received in Christ.

Reinforcing the eschatological context for this greeting is the fact that both *grace and peace* come from *God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. The three titles used for God and Jesus here (“Father,” “Lord,” and “Christ”) are all informed by biblical and Jewish eschatological thought. In relation to Jesus, “Lord” and “Christ” draw from messianic expectation, together pointing to the universal lordship of the Davidic king and Son of God. Although not often recognized, the fatherhood of God is frequently associated with the exodus and the second exodus (eschatological redemption) in the Old Testament (Exod. 4:22; Deut. 32:5-20; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:19; 31:9; Hos. 11:1-11).<sup>29</sup> This eschatological association becomes even clearer in intertestamental Jewish writings. For example, *Jubilees* 1:24-25, in speaking of the eschatological redemption of Israel, cites God as promising: “I shall be a father to them, and they will be sons to me. And they will all be called ‘sons of the living God.’ And every an-

23. Gk. χάρις καὶ εἰρήνη.

24. Gk. χαίρειν.

25. Gk. εἰρήνη.

26. See Judith M. Lieu, “‘Grace to you and peace’: The Apostolic Greeting,” *BJRL* 68 (1985), 161-78, on its background and influence.

27. Fee, 35.

28. Barrett, 35.

29. See Ciampa, *The Presence and Function of Scripture*, 39-44; cf. James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of ΥΙΟΘΕΣΙΑ in the Pauline Corpus* (WUNT 2.48; Tübingen: Mohr, 1992), 96-117.

gel and spirit will know and acknowledge that they are my sons, and I am their father."<sup>30</sup>

Both God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ cooperate in securing salvation and making it effective. Christ and the Father are thus both accorded divine functions. The centrality of Jesus Christ in these opening verses is difficult to miss. In this salutation he is mentioned four times, and in the following thanksgiving he appears in every verse.

## B. Thanksgiving, 1:4-9

*<sup>4</sup>I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. <sup>5</sup>For in him you have been enriched in every way — with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge — <sup>6</sup>God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. <sup>7</sup>Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. <sup>8</sup>He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Whereas the structure of Paul's introductory thanksgivings is Hellenistic, the contents stand in the tradition of biblical and Jewish thought. As Joseph A. Fitzmyer observes, "Though it [Paul's thanksgiving] resembles the Greco-Roman thanksgiving, the sentiments expressed are often phrased in characteristic Jewish 'eucharistic' formulas, sometimes recalling even the Qumran [songs of praise]."<sup>31</sup>

Praise and thanksgiving are interrelated in the Old Testament. In fact, the Old Testament has no independent concept of thanks. The Hebrew word for "to confess" is used of confessing sins and of confessing or declaring God's goodness. In both the Old Testament and the Apocrypha the object of thanks is always God. The thank offering (Lev. 7:12-18), a type of peace offering, was the Israelites' opportunity to say thanks to God, perhaps for some specific provision or deliverance. The Psalms include both general praise of God for his greatness and grace and specific thanksgiving in descriptive and declarative praise psalms respectively. The verb to *thank*<sup>32</sup> in 1:4 is not found in the LXX (Old Testament), but it does appear in the Apocrypha. The Essene *Hodayot* (songs of praise) found in the caves at Qumran, which represent a development of the Old Testament Psalms, are not unlike Paul's thanksgivings. They stress God's deliverance (usually of

30. Cf. *Psalms of Solomon* 17:27; *Testament of Judah* 24:3; 3 Macc. 6:3, 8; Tob. 13:4; 1QH ix 33-36.

31. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Introduction to the New Testament Epistles," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (ed. R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer, and R. D. Murphy; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), 770.

32. Gk. εὐχαριστέω. The LXX typically uses ἐξομολογέω.

the “Teacher of Righteousness”), the hopelessness of the human predicament without God’s intervention, sanctification from impurity, and the certainty of participating in eschatological salvation.

In Hellenistic letters a wish for the health of the recipients usually followed the salutation. 3 John 2 is quite close to this convention: “I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you.” Paul’s introductory thanksgivings are more elaborate and serve several purposes. They are loosely comparable to the *exordium* of ancient rhetoric, the function of which was to use praise to secure the favorable attention of the listeners and to preview the main themes of the speech or letter.<sup>33</sup> In Paul’s case the praise is without irony or flattery since the thanks is directed to God, and to do so in any way other than sincerely would be to mock him.

Most critical for understanding 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 is its study in comparison to Paul’s other introductory thanksgivings, which appear in all of his letters directed to churches except Galatians, where he was not in a grateful mood.<sup>34</sup> Paul’s thanksgivings in fact serve more functions than the traditional *exordium* did, and 1:4-9 is a case in point. Its purpose is fourfold.<sup>35</sup> It has a *didactic* function, reminding the Corinthians of teaching Paul had already given them, especially the divine source of their spiritual endowments and the second advent of Christ. A *paraenetic* or hortatory function is also evident. Although this aspect is more marked in Paul’s thanksgivings which include intercessory prayer, it can be seen implicitly in the references to waiting for Christ’s return and the related need to be fit for that day. The stress on the fact that their gifts (in the broadest sense) come from God might also have encouraged the Corinthians to see them as existing for the “common good” (12:7; 14:5) and not for personal aggrandizement. The positive and confident sentiments in the thanksgiving, which are so startling in a letter that deals with so many serious faults in the congregation, serve a *pastoral* purpose, communicating Paul’s genuine concern and care for the church. Finally, 1:4-9 has an *epistolary* function, introducing the main themes of the letter.<sup>36</sup>

What Paul does not say in 1:4-9 is also significant. The achievements of God, not those of the Corinthians, are rehearsed. There is no talk of their

33. See D. E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 186; with particular reference to 1 Cor. 1:4-9 see M. M. Mitchell, *The Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 194-97 and Witherington, 87-90.

34. See P. T. O’Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul* (NovTSup 49; Leiden: Brill, 1977), esp. 107-37.

35. See O’Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings*, 134-37.

36. It is possible to exaggerate this function, which is most clear in the Colossian parallel. Witherington, for example, suggests that Paul ends in 1:7-9 with eschatological pronouncements in anticipation of the closing of the letter in ch. 15. However, since the Pauline thanksgivings typically refer to the Second Advent, it is more likely that 1:4-9 anticipates the appearance of subjects later in the letter than their sequence. Paul’s purpose in foregrounding eschatology in the thanksgiving suggests that he expects his readers to understand the whole letter within an eschatological framework.

faith, hope, and love (cf. 13:13) as in Paul's other thanksgivings, nor of their work (cf. 15:58). Paul's words are genuine and designed to build up, but they are not warm or intimate, as, say, in the introductory thanksgiving in Philippians.

Nonetheless, it is striking that Paul thanks God for the very things that are causing the church problems. He commends the presence of gifts, however, not the use to which they were being put in Corinth. In contrast to Corinthian boasting in their leaders and about themselves, Paul opens the letter by boasting about what God has done through Christ Jesus (cf. 1:31). The frequent passive verbs, all of which have God as the implied subject, stress this further: grace was given to them by God (v. 4); they had been made rich by God (v. 5); the testimony about Christ was confirmed among them by God (v. 6); they were called into fellowship with Jesus Christ by God (v. 9). In this way 1:4-9 looks forward to 4:7: "What do you have that you did not receive?"

In terms of structure Paul's introductory thanksgivings follow the following pattern: he (1) gives thanks (2) to God (3) always (4) for the recipients, (5) for certain reasons, which are then elaborated.<sup>37</sup> In 1:4-9 Paul gives thanks for the riches of God's grace given to them at their conversion. The riches they possess in the present include a full allowance of spiritual gifts and a certain hope of a glorious future.

The paragraph supplies several definitions of what it means to be a Christian. A Christian is someone who has been given God's grace (v. 4), who has been enriched with spiritual endowments (vv. 5-7), who eagerly awaits the Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed (v. 7), who will stand shameless on that day (v. 8), and who is in fellowship with God's Son, Jesus Christ. A more impressive list of benefits would be difficult to compose. Little wonder that they are framed in a thanksgiving.

### 1. For the Grace of God Already Received in Christ, 1:4-6

**1:4** Of Barnabas in Acts 11:23, who visited the church of Antioch, Luke reports: "When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad." Likewise Paul gives thanks for the grace of God given to the church in Corinth. The verb "to give thanks" controls the whole of 1:4-9 (vv. 4-8 are in fact one sentence). After declaring that he gives thanks for them "always," in vv. 5-9 he supplies the ground for his thanksgiving. Paul habitually gives thanks to God<sup>38</sup> for his converts and for all Christians (cf. Rom. 1:8; 1 Thess.

37. Cf. P. Schubert, *Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1939).

38. Does Paul thank "God" (TNIV), "my God," or "our God"? The MSS evidence is strongest for "my God." Against it is the possibility that copyists added the personal pronoun to conform the wording to Rom. 1:8, Phil. 1:3, and Phlm. 4. However, it is more likely that "my" was omitted accidentally. "Our God," which is found in only one minuscule

1:2; 2:13; 2 Thess. 1:3; 2:13; Col. 1:3; Phil. 1:3; Phlm. 4). It is not that Paul had done nothing toward their salvation. Quite the contrary (see 9:1-2; 15:1-2, 10: "I worked harder than all [the apostles]!")! Rather, out of humility he gives the credit entirely to God.

Just as Paul can lay personal claim to the gospel, here he gives thanks to *my God*. Even though he disagreed with the Corinthians on many counts and disapproved of much of their behavior, Paul recognized that God had begun a good work in them at their conversion.

The basis for Paul's thanks is the *grace* of God which he had shown toward them. In other introductory thanksgivings Paul gives thanks for God's activity in the gospel (e.g., Phil. 1:6; Col. 1:4ff.), but nowhere else is grace such a focus. Grace here is not God's loving favor, a motive for God's acting on behalf of the helpless, but the specific effect or concrete expression of God's mercy in making the Corinthians new creatures in Christ. In Titus 2:11-13, the grace of God "teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (cf. 1 Thess. 1:9-10). While Paul is sincerely thankful for the grace the Corinthians have received, much of this letter will focus on helping the Corinthians learn the lessons that grace would teach them (especially that of saying "No" to immorality and idolatry and "Yes" to purity in life and worship).

Verses 5 and 7 focus in particular on their spiritual gifts as manifestations of God's grace. In v. 4 the cause for thanks is more general and broad in scope. When Paul thinks of the grace of God given to someone, he usually has in mind his apostolic ministry to Gentiles, as, for example, in 3:10: "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation" (Rom. 12:3; 15:15-21; Gal. 2:9; cf. 2 Cor. 6:1). Paul also uses "grace" to characterize himself as the preacher of a universal gospel, available to both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 1:5; 15:15; Gal. 1:15-24; 2:7-9). The epitome of grace for Paul was the admission of Gentiles, people without God and without hope, like many of the Corinthians, to the glorious privileges which had been exclusive to Israel.<sup>39</sup>

**1:5** Paul explains further the meaning of *his grace given you in Christ Jesus*, focusing upon a specific manifestation. To be given grace is to be *enriched in every way*. Paul regularly speaks of the liberality and generosity of God in his thanksgivings, using terms like "fullness" and "abundance." Here, and throughout the Corinthian correspondence, he prefers the imagery of wealth.<sup>40</sup> Whereas in Romans, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philipians God is said to have riches with respect to grace, kindness, glory, and the like, in 1 and 2 Corinthians believers are made rich. This is unique in

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(491), might have been influenced by "our" in vv. 2 and 3 or may be a deliberate change to carry on the thought from v. 3 that God and the Lord belong to all believers.

39. Cf. O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings*, 110-11.

40. Gk. πλουτίζω and cognates.

the Pauline corpus outside of 1 Timothy 6:17-18. Quite possibly the Corinthians had used this language of themselves (cf. 4:8), which may explain its appearance here. Either way Paul uses it without reservation. Whether or not the Corinthians said it first, it is true: believers in Christ are rich. The believers in Corinth had become rich at great cost, through the poverty of Christ (2 Cor. 8:9) and of Paul himself (4:8-13; 2 Cor. 6:10).

In what sense are they rich? Paul supplies a specific example which does not so much limit the words *in every way*, but narrows the focus and picks up something they themselves valued highly: *with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge*. As O'Brien notes: "The kinds of wealth mentioned were those which made the strongest appeal to the Corinthians."<sup>41</sup> *Speech and knowledge* is literally "word and knowledge,"<sup>42</sup> and might be better translated, "utterance and knowledge." These two terms occur many more times in this letter than in Paul's other letters. Their appearance in the thanksgiving obviously anticipates later discussions in the book. Both words occur as gifts of the Spirit in chapters 12-14 (see esp. 12:8: "word of knowledge"). And in 1:18-4:17 and 8:1-13 they are used in a negative way (see 1:17-18; 2:1-4; 8:1-3, 10-11). What do they signify in 1:5? A general reference to two of "the spiritual graces which make up the Christian character"<sup>43</sup> is in view, no doubt alluding to certain spiritual gifts but not confined to them.

**1:6** The relationship between v. 6 and v. 5 depends on how the conjunction is understood.<sup>44</sup> Either the testimony being confirmed in them is the reason for the Corinthians becoming rich, and the word should be translated "since" or "because" (as in NIV), or the Corinthians' becoming rich is the evidence of the testimony being confirmed in them, and it should be translated "just as" or "even as" (as in KJV, RSV) or "thus" (as in TNIV). Although both options are acceptable grammatically, the latter is preferable in the light of 1 Thessalonians 1:5, which has an analogous use of the ambiguous conjunction, which clearly favors the comparative sense.<sup>45</sup> In other words, inasmuch as the Corinthians were enriched God confirmed Paul's testimony about Christ in their midst. This validation of Paul's preaching by God functions rhetorically to strengthen Paul's status in the eyes of the Corinthians.

"The testimony of Christ," to translate literally, is another way of talking about the "gospel," which is frequently found in Paul's other introductory thanksgivings. In view of this the TNIV is right to take "Christ" as the object of the phrase; the testimony is *about Christ*. Paul says that God *confirmed* this testimony *among you* or in your midst. The whole verse draws on imagery from commercial law. When Paul preached about Christ to the Corinthians, God guaranteed his testimony by enriching them with spiritual

41. O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings*, 118.

42. Gk. λόγῳ καὶ γνώσει.

43. Lightfoot, 148.

44. Gk. καθὼς.

45. Lightfoot, 148.

graces and gifts.<sup>46</sup> It is significant that Paul puts so much emphasis on their conversion, which comes to the fore again in 2:1-4 and 15:1-3. They received gifts when God confirmed the gospel among them, not at some later point in their experience. This is in effect what v. 7 goes on to say.

**2. For the Gifts of Grace Which Sustain Us Until Our Anticipated Approval by God on the Day of the Lord Jesus, 1:7-9**

1:7 As a result of God's confirming Paul's testimony and the Corinthians' being enriched, they *do not lack any spiritual gift*. The word *charisma*, gift of grace, could refer exclusively to the specific spiritual gifts discussed in chapters 12-14. However, Paul is also able to use it more broadly for the gracious gifts of redemption in general, as in Romans 5:15-16 and 6:23, and for other gifts which do not fit the description of spiritual gifts.<sup>47</sup> Since 1:7 is the first reference to *charismata* in the letter, it need not be limited to the sense of spiritual gifts. Like "utterance and knowledge" in v. 5, it nonetheless looks forward to Paul's discussion of that subject.<sup>48</sup>

Paul says that the Corinthians do not fall short in any gift of grace, as they *eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed*. Paul's introductory thanksgivings regularly refer to the return of Christ (Romans and Philipians are the only exceptions). Believers *eagerly wait* for their final adoption (Rom. 8:23), the hope of righteousness (Gal. 5:5), and their revelation as the sons of God (Rom. 8:19). Here the revelation refers to the same momentous event, but it focuses on its central feature, the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Paul uses several terms for the final and dramatic manifestation of our Lord. It will be a "coming" (15:23; 16:17),<sup>49</sup> the Latin equivalent of which is "advent." It will also be an "appearing" (e.g., Titus 2:13),<sup>50</sup> the word used in the LXX for theophanies of the Lord, occasions when he came to redeem his people (e.g., Gen. 35:7; Deut. 33:2; Jer. 29:14), and for the coming "day of the Lord" (Joel 2:11; Mal. 4:5). In v. 8 he refers to it as *the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*. In v. 7 it is a revelation, a disclosing or uncovering of something (or someone) that (or who) had been hidden.<sup>51</sup> In the LXX the word is used for a variety of disclosures to leaders such as Balaam (Num. 22:31; 24:4, 16), Samuel (1 Sam. 3:7, 21), David (2 Sam. 7:27), and the prophets generally (e.g., Amos 3:7).<sup>52</sup> For Paul the gospel is a "*rev-*

46. Fee, 40-41.

47. For example, the gift of contentment in matters sexual in 1 Cor. 7:7.

48. Cf. esp. 1 Cor. 13:8-13, which spell out what 1:7 implies, that spiritual gifts are only for the present age and will cease when Christ returns.

49. Gk. παρουσία.

50. Gk. ἐπιφάνεια.

51. Gk. ἀποκάλυψις.

52. For a handy summary see Walter Riggans, "The Parousia: Getting Our Terms Right," *Them* 21.1 (1995), 14-16.

elation of the mystery hidden for long ages past" (Rom. 16:25; cf. Eph. 3:3). To speak of the Lord Jesus Christ being revealed in the future implies that we do not perceive him as he really is at present. The book of Revelation, the first word of which is *apocalypse*, confirms this. When John sees Jesus clearly, he falls at his feet (Rev. 1:17). The Transfiguration was a similar glimpse of the glory of Jesus to be revealed at his advent. At his revelation, heaven's opinion of Jesus (cf. Revelation 4-5) will be shared by those on earth.

With reference to the return of Jesus the revelation of our Lord will be associated with both judgment and vindication, arousing fear for some and joy for others. On "the day of God's wrath, his righteous judgment will be revealed" (Rom. 2:5; cf. 1 Cor. 3:13), when "the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with blazing fire with his powerful angels" (2 Thess. 1:7). Paul is also convinced that "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). A double purpose of wrath and glory is taught throughout the New Testament with respect to the coming of Christ.

Describing the church in Corinth as those who are eagerly waiting is generous on Paul's part, in view of the fact that some clearly did not fit this description (see on 4:8 and 15:12). Clearly Paul must deal with the subject at length (3:13; 4:3; 5:5; 7:29; 11:26; and ch. 15, esp. 15:23, 47, 52), and his mention of it here intended to affirm this fundamental orientation for all believers. Verses 7 and 8 look forward to this material and form a basis for subsequent teaching and admonitions.

**1:8** Paul's thanksgiving moves through three phases. In *the past* the Corinthians were given God's grace (v. 4), were enriched in every way (v. 5), and had the gospel confirmed among them (v. 6). In *the present* they are amply supplied with the gifts of grace, and they live in eager expectation of the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 7). In *the future* they will be kept blameless on the day of Christ (v. 8).<sup>53</sup> As in the introductory thanksgiving of Philippians, active participation in the gospel is evidence that God is at work (and what God starts he finishes; see Phil. 1:3, 5).

*He will also keep you firm* is literally, "who will also confirm you." The verb is the same as in v. 6. Just as the testimony about Christ was "confirmed" among them by God, so also the Corinthians will be "confirmed" by God.<sup>54</sup> Instead of speaking of God's strengthening or establishing them (as he does of believers in 1 Thess. 3:2, 13; 2 Thess. 2:17; 3:3; Rom. 1:11; 16:25), Paul carries on the legal metaphor from v. 6. The Corinthians will be confirmed in the sense of being pronounced not guilty (cf. Col. 1:22), *blame-*

53. Cf. O'Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings*, 126-27.

54. Some take the subject to be "our Lord Jesus Christ," the nearest antecedent of the relative pronoun, rather than God. However, God is the subject of the other passive verbs in 1:4-9 and of the prior occurrence of the same verb in v. 6. Furthermore, v. 9 implies that the faithful God is ultimately responsible for all of the blessings enumerated in the thanksgiving.

less, when they appear before God at the last judgment, that is, at “the End,” the winding up of all of history. The word has also a moral sense that complements its legal flavor: BDAG defines it as “blameless, irreproachable.” That the Corinthians would be blameless at the Great Assize suggests that they would not be found guilty of having major faults such as sexual immorality, greed, or idolatry, the errors that Paul is intent on correcting throughout the letter. Paul stresses that the day of the Lord Jesus will be a day of reckoning, a theme he develops in 3:13-15 and 4:5. “The Day will bring [all things] to light” (3:13).

The phrase *to the end* could mean “completely” or simply refer to “the End.” Perhaps it has a double sense here: the Corinthians will be acquitted entirely on the last day.<sup>55</sup> In referring to *the day of the Lord* Paul employs a common Old Testament phrase with fearful associations for those who will not be *blameless*, which described the Day of Judgment: “Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD,” writes Amos. “That day will be darkness, not light” (Amos 5:18; cf. Joel 2:31). To be *blameless* on that day, and to wait for it calmly and joyfully, is a wonderful thing. It forms a fitting climax to the thanksgiving. Paul is at pains to stress to the Corinthians that their pardon will be due to God’s grace alone (1:4): “He will confirm you.” There will be no room for Corinthian boasting on that day (cf. 5:2; etc.), except in God (1:31).

**1:9** The Corinthians can be confident as they eagerly wait for the day of the Lord because, as the first three words of v. 9 in the Greek state, *God is faithful*. The Old Testament and early Judaism stress unequivocally the trustworthiness and reliability of God. God can be trusted to come good on all his promises and to deliver on all his undertakings (cf., e.g., Deut. 7:9; Ps. 144:13; Isa. 49:7). Paul’s words are reminiscent of one of the benedictions given after the *Haftarah* in the synagogue, which speaks of “the faithful God who speaks and acts.”<sup>56</sup> The specific way in which God will demonstrate his faithfulness to them is indicated in the previous verse, namely, he will “establish” them as “blameless.” The character of God is the solid basis of their certain hope.

The faithful God *called* the Corinthians. The divine call opened the letter, 1:1-2, and is taken up again in 1:26 and 7:17-24.<sup>57</sup> For Paul, the call to salvation, which occurs at conversion, is a summons which is irresistible; it is not like the gangster’s “offer you cannot refuse,” but like the wooing by a lover of his beloved. The call is the historical outworking of election, as in 1:26-27, where “choose” and “call” are used synonymously. In Romans 8:28-30 the apostle insists that the ones God calls are those upon whom he set his love (foreknew); the same group that he predestined to be con-

55. Cf. Barrett, 39; O’Brien, *Introductory Thanksgivings*, 129.

56. W. C. van Unnik, “Reisepläne und Amen-Sagen, Zusammenhang und Gedankenfolge in 2 Korinther 1:15-24,” in *Studia Paulina in Honorem Johannis de Zwaan septuagenarii* (Haarlem: Erven Bohn, 1953), 221.

57. On Old Testament background to “call” see L. Coenen, *NIDNTT* 1:272-73.

formed to the likeness of his Son are justified and glorified. The identical logic is present here. If God calls, he will also confirm as blameless at the Day of Judgment those whom he has called.

The call is to *fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord*. It is no accident that in a letter in which Paul insists that he preaches only Jesus Christ to the Corinthians (2:2), he opens with ten references to Christ in nine verses. Whereas Christian existence can be defined according to what has happened or will happen to the believer, the most comprehensive definition focuses upon the intimate relation between believers and Christ. The Corinthians have a communion and fellowship with Christ that “exists now and extends to eternity.”<sup>58</sup> Verses 8–9 demonstrate that for Paul the judicial and participationist ways of looking at salvation are not exclusive alternatives, as sometimes thought. He moves effortlessly from speaking of forgiveness on the day of Christ to fellowship with Christ in the present.

The title *Son* (of God) is frequently used by Paul in contexts where he stresses the close relation between the Son and the Father in the work of salvation (2 Cor. 1:18; Rom. 1:9; 8:29). It appears again in 15:28 in similar fashion.<sup>59</sup> Like the titles “Lord” and “Christ,” the title “Son,” especially in relationship with God the Father, also has covenantal and eschatological associations (2 Sam. 7:14; Pss. 2:7; 110:1).<sup>60</sup> Jesus is both the eternal Son of God and the promised Son of God who is David’s son, the king and head of the new covenant people of God, who reigns eternally over all creation.

## II. TRUE AND FALSE WISDOM AND CORINTHIAN FACTIONALISM, 1:10–4:17

1 Corinthians 1:10–4:17 is marked off as a major unit by the repetition of “I appeal to you” in 1:10 and 4:16. Following a request for unity in 1:10, Paul mounts a long and complex argument against divisions in the church. The Corinthian church, like Corinthian society in general, was keenly conscious of social status. Caught up in rivalries, they boasted about their own possession of wisdom and rhetorical eloquence or that of their favorite leaders. A point of contention with Paul was his failure to display this status-enhancing rhetoric expected of a “wise” and cultured person worthy of their allegiance.

Bruce Winter provides a comprehensive picture of first-century soph-

58. Robertson and Plummer, 8.

59. Cf. M. Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion* (trans. John Bowden; London: SCM, 1976), 8: “for Paul the *soteriological* rather than the speculative significance of the term stands in the foreground.”

60. See M. Weinfeld, “Covenant, Davidic,” *IDBSup* 190–92, on the covenantal background of the father-son imagery and its messianic interpretation.

istry that may help explain the behavior of the believers in Corinth with respect to their leaders.<sup>1</sup> It is possible that Apollos's own use of rhetoric at Corinth had incited sophist-style factionalism.<sup>2</sup> Winter argues that Paul's discussion of wisdom in chapters 1–4 is in fact a point-by-point refutation of aspects of sophistic behavior. When sophists came into a city, they broadcast their own reputes, extemporized in impressive oral displays, and used persuasive rhetoric with great flair.<sup>3</sup> The "spin doctors" of their day, the sophists tried to inspire a particular commitment and zeal for themselves among their disciples.<sup>4</sup> What Paul accuses the Corinthian Christians of, namely "quarrels" and "jealousy" (1:11, 3:3), were actually terms for sophistic discipleship.<sup>5</sup>

According to Winter, Paul turns all the sophistic and rhetorical terminology on its head.<sup>6</sup> He needed no topic upon which to extemporize and so prove his rhetorical superiority (2:1); he already had a message to proclaim (2:2). He had no renown, but used oratory characterized by weakness and fear (2:3). He inspired confidence, or "faith" (2:5), not by the "power" (2:5) of "persuasion" (2:4) or rhetorical skill, but by the "clear proof" of the work of the Spirit in his audience (2:4). Paul reverses the pattern of sophistic boasting (3:18-23)<sup>7</sup> and urges the Corinthians to "imitate" him and "boast" in him (as the sophists did in their leaders), not in impressive and powerful wisdom, but in sufferings and afflictions, in the way of the cross (4:6-21).<sup>8</sup> He warns that rhetoric would empty the cross of its power (1:17) because sophistic methods would overshadow the message itself.<sup>9</sup>

Some scholars have expressed doubts about Winter's reconstruction. Murphy-O'Connor, for instance, is not convinced that the sophists were a major force in first-century Corinth.<sup>10</sup> While he agrees that there are good grounds for their presence in Alexandria, the evidence for Achaia and Corinth is lacking. Further, terms like "jealousy" and "strife" were in everyday use, and rhetorical terms, such as we find in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, were the vernacular of lawyers and administrators in places like Corinth. Much of Winter's contribution, however, does not depend on the specific identification of the influence of the sophistic movement on the Corinthian Christians. The sophistic movement was on the rise in Alexandria at least, a very influential city, and key cities in the empire were porous when it came to

1. Bruce W. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

2. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 177-78.

3. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 144-47.

4. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 185-87.

5. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 175-76.

6. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 149-50.

7. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 195-96.

8. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 195-202.

9. Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 188.

10. See J. Murphy-O'Connor, "Review of Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*," *RB* 110 (2003), 428-33.

the movement of people and ideas.<sup>11</sup> But whether or not the sophists were the culprits is less the point than simply that the church in Corinth was clearly in the thrall of human rhetoric, with its elevation of human brilliance and its tendency to feed competition and pride.

Either way, the apostle Paul is not just dissociating himself from a sophistic valuing of form over content.<sup>12</sup> Rather, Paul is arguing against the whole worldview (“wisdom”) expressed by the speech pattern (“word”) of sophistry, a worldview that exalts human power in both form and content. The cross as the power of salvation appears as weakness, and a speech pattern in keeping with the cross therefore takes a cruciform shape.<sup>13</sup> In order to nullify any human attempt at self-salvation, God “chose a means of revelation actually contradictory to [human] wisdom — the foolish proclamation of a crucified Savior (1:21b).”<sup>14</sup> Instead of explaining human reason and logic by human means, in 2:13 he explains spiritual things by spiritual means. Therefore, the truth of the cross “cannot be achieved through the best of human intellect and strength but must be received as a gift in the humble submission of faith and trust.”<sup>15</sup> The truth is that Paul’s own writing is highly persuasive, but its rhetoric subverts sophistic speech and therefore sophistic wisdom.<sup>16</sup>

The Corinthians were saying that they belonged to their favorite leaders and boasted about their wisdom and power and Paul’s deficiencies in these areas. To heal their divisions, Paul says four main things in response: (1) the message of the cross spells the end of human wisdom and power; (2) the cross redefines wisdom and folly, power and weakness; (3) instead of boasting in their leaders’ wisdom and power they should boast in the wisdom and power of God in the gospel which gives them a favorable and secure status before God; and (4) the Corinthians do not belong to their leaders but rather their leaders belong to them, and, above all, they all belong to Christ!

Along with profound treatments of topics such as wisdom, preaching, the Spirit, the church, and Christian leadership, the unit is undergirded by an apocalyptic eschatology of the cross and a consistent emphasis on the free and surprising grace of God. Numerous words supply an eschatologi-

11. All historians of the early church are involved in some conjecture. Winter’s case must not be judged simply on external grounds. Murphy-O’Connor is convinced of sophists in Alexandria because of Philo’s testimony from that city. We do well to remember the incomplete state of so much evidence from the ancient world. Were it not for Philo, he would presumably not grant the presence of sophists even there. The fact that Philo’s testimony survives is remarkable and is taken as significant because it is probably the “tip of the iceberg,” much of which is no longer extant.

12. Pace Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 188.

13. Thiselton, 157.

14. John B. Polhill, “The Wisdom of God and Factionalism,” *RevExp* 80/3 (1983), 329.

15. Polhill, “Factionalism,” 330.

16. Joop F. M. Smit, “What Is Apollos? What Is Paul?: In Search for the Coherence of First Corinthians 1:10–4:21,” *NovTest* 44.3 (2002), 247.

cal flavor (shame, nullify, mystery, etc.), and six Old Testament quotations (1:19; 1:31; 2:9; 2:16; 3:19; 3:20) announce the end-time judgment of human wisdom that the cross represents. According to 1 Corinthians 1–4, the cross signals the end of the world’s puny power, arrogant boasting, fancy talk, shallow wisdom, and the like. The following chapters announce the beginning of a new world marked by such things as sexual purity, mutual love, reconciliation, self-restraint, and unity. Paul’s apocalyptic thinking was made up of five elements,<sup>17</sup> all of which are evident in 1 Corinthians 1–4 with reference to the cross: (1) God’s conflict with enslaving powers (2) involves a decisive/invasive action in Christ, (3) which issues forth in a judgment that is (4) final and (5) cosmic/universal in scope.

The grace of God also suffuses the opening chapters of the letter, and comes again to prominence in chapter 15. It was Corinthian pride that led to the divisions in the church, and it is Christian humility, the lowering of yourself before others of equal or lower social status, that is the solution. Thus it is not surprising that Paul repeatedly champions the undeserved favor and kindness of God to deflate their pride, climaxing in two piercing questions: “What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you did not?” (4:7).

If scholars such as Klaus Berger believe that Paul did not consider the cross in terms of atonement, sacrifice, or reconciliation, but rather as a symbol of the radical reversal of values of the gospel,<sup>18</sup> evangelicals are in danger of making the opposite mistake. As Carson observes, the Corinthians’ “love of pomp, prestige, rhetoric, social approval, publicly lauded ‘wisdom’ . . . demonstrated that they had not reflected very deeply on the entailments of the gospel of the crucified Messiah.”<sup>19</sup> In Thiselton’s words, the cross “has transformative and epistemological implications as well as social and ethical consequences.”<sup>20</sup>

Ellis (and others) claim to have found a standard Jewish form of biblical exegesis in the opening chapters of the letter, the proem midrash, which was used in the synagogue as a kind of homily or sermon.<sup>21</sup> He finds two examples in 1 Corinthians 1–2 which have a three-part structure. The first example is 1 Corinthians 1:18–31. It can be divided into (i) 1:18–20 — theme and initial texts: Isaiah 29:14 and 19:11–12; cf. 33:18; (ii) 1:20–30 — exposition linked to the initial and final texts by the catchwords “wise” (26–27), “wisdom” (21–22, 30), “foolish” (25, 27), “foolishness” (21, 23), and “boast” (29); and (iii) 1:31 — final text: Jeremiah 9:22–23. The second one is

17. See Douglas K. Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003), 68–69.

18. Klaus Berger, *Paulus* (Munich: Beck, 2002).

19. Donald A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: An Exposition of Passages from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 70.

20. Thiselton, 175.

21. E. Earle Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 151–59.

1 Corinthians 2:6-16. It can be subdivided into (i) 2:6-9 — theme and initial texts: Isaiah 64:4; 65:16 (LXX); (ii) 2:10-15 — exposition linked to the initial and final texts by the catchwords “man” (11, 14, cf. 13), “see” (11-12), and “know” (11, 14); and (iii) 2:16 — final text and application: Isaiah 40:13. However, three reservations caution against detecting these structures in 1 Corinthians. The Jewish form in question opened with Pentateuchal texts, not texts from Isaiah. The final texts in the above examples are not clearly linked to the initial texts. And the Jewish examples are much longer (as, e.g., in Philo). Nevertheless, Ellis’s work alerts us to the crucial role of Old Testament texts at every level in these passages.

Hays’s summary of the role of Scripture in the section is accurate: “The backbone of the discussion in 1.18–3.23 is a series of six OT quotations (1.19; 1.31; 2.9; 2.16; 3.19; 3.20) all taken from passages that depict God as one who acts to judge and save his people in ways that defy human imagination.”<sup>22</sup> Paul’s point is that God’s wisdom is beyond the grasp of human wisdom. The citations, allusions, and echoes of Scripture are not illustrations or occasional exclamation points but rather the substance of Paul’s argument.

## A. Request for Unity (1:10-17)

<sup>10</sup>I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

<sup>11</sup>My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe’s household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. <sup>12</sup>What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.”

<sup>13</sup>Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup>I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup>so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. <sup>16</sup>(Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don’t remember if I baptized anyone else.) <sup>17</sup>For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel — not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

### 1. Initial Request, 1:10

**1:10** This pivotal verse marks a transition from the opening of the letter to the main body.<sup>23</sup> The initial words are regularly translated as *I ap-*

22. R. B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 402-3.

23. On such transitions see J. T. Sanders, “The Transition from Opening Epistolary

peal to you (TNIV, REB, ESV), or “I beseech you” (KJV), or “I beg you” (Moffatt, Barrett).<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, those who find rhetorical patterns in Paul’s letters, such as Mitchell and Witherington, regard the words as introducing deliberative rhetoric, a series of arguments Paul musters to persuade the audience to heed his appeal. In this case 1:10 is the theme statement for the entire letter.<sup>25</sup> In 1:18–4:21 Paul opposes disunity in the church in general; in chapters 5–16 he takes on the issues that must be dealt with before genuine unity can be achieved. 1 Corinthians, then, is Paul’s attempt to urge the Corinthians to come together in unity.

However, the most thorough study of the verb in question, by Bjerkelund, contends that its occurrences in 1 Corinthians 1:10, 4:16, and 16:15 all reflect the nonrhetorical use found consistently in papyri, inscriptions, royal documents, and early Christian literature.<sup>26</sup> The words *I appeal to you* were a common request formula in ancient letters. Paul uses them regularly to introduce a point that he wishes to underscore (see 4:16; 16:15; 1 Thess. 4:1, 10; 5:14). A better translation in 1:10 would simply be “I ask you” (Thiselton). Rather than being “the *propositio* . . . for the entire discourse,”<sup>27</sup> it is a request made on the basis of Paul’s special relation to the Corinthians: Paul is a member of their family (*brothers and sisters*), and one who speaks as Christ’s commissioned agent (*in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*), that is, as “an apostle of Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 1:1).

While it is true that disunity is a major theme of the letter, extending beyond chapters 1–4,<sup>28</sup> to give it primacy obscures other equally important concerns. As argued in the introduction to the commentary, rather than reading 1 Corinthians with Greco-Roman categories such as rhetoric in mind, it is better to take Old Testament and Jewish frames of reference as the primary lens and to notice both the form and content of the letter. In this light, disunity is one of several behaviors that characterize the Corinthians as “worldly,” as “acting like mere human beings” (3:3). Paul’s goal is bigger than merely having them live harmoniously.

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Thanksgiving to Body in the Letters of the Pauline Corpus,” *JBL* 81(1962), 348–62 and Carl J. Bjerkelund, *Parakalo: Form, Funktion und Sinn der Parakalo-Sätze in den Paulinischen Briefen* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1967).

24. Gk. παρακαλῶ.

25. Among those who support this view are Wilhelm Wuellner, “Greek Rhetoric and Pauline Argumentation,” in *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition: In Honorem Robert M. Grant* (ed. William R. Schoedel and Robert L. Wilken; Theologie Historique 54; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 182–83: “[1:10] expresses the main theme of the whole of 1 Cor.”; George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 24; and most fully M. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*.

26. Cf. Thiselton, 109–14.

27. Witherington, 69.

28. The letter contains not only explicit references to Corinthian factionalism but also many terms, appeals, and themes that deal with divisions in the church. See M. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 68–80, 180–83.

As the allusion to Malachi 1:11 in 1 Corinthians 1:2 indicates, Paul's purpose in writing is anything but mundane, but rather is driven by an eschatological vision of Jews and Gentiles together as the sanctified people of God worshipping him "in every place." Paul's *raison d'être* in v. 17, to "preach the gospel," is itself an eschatological, divinely commissioned activity modeled after the Isaianic herald (see below on 1:17). His use of the Old Testament in 1:10–4:17 also shows that Paul is seeking to redefine the Corinthians' identity within an apocalyptic framework.<sup>29</sup> To achieve this goal of "glorifying God's name among the nations" (Mal. 1:11), Paul must seek not only to unify the Corinthians Christians but, just as importantly, to rid them of pagan influences other than disunity, in particular sexual immorality (cf. 6:18), idolatry (cf. 10:14), and greed. Paul's task is to seek the Corinthians' transformation by the renewing of their mind, so that they might live lives that are holy (1 Cor. 1:2) and pleasing to God (Rom. 12:2; cf. Titus 2:11-13).

As already noted, Paul's request draws its force from the intimate family bond he shares with the Corinthians: he addresses them as *brothers and sisters*.<sup>30</sup> Given that the Corinthians and Paul do not share the same parents, this nonliteral use would have seemed odd to a Roman,<sup>31</sup> though Jews regularly addressed each other as siblings. Paul's reasoning was that all Christians have been adopted into God's family (Gal. 4:4-6). Interestingly, the language of kinship appears more often in 1 Corinthians than anywhere else in his letters, comprising almost a third of its occurrences.<sup>32</sup> The same language is repeated in the next verse. To address the Corinthians as siblings is appropriate to a call to unity, since brothers and sisters, though prone to squabbling, have a compelling basis for getting along. It also evokes Paul's affection and equal regard for them.<sup>33</sup> As Schrage notes, apostolic exhortation can be both brotherly and fatherly (cf. 4:14-17).<sup>34</sup>

Paul also makes his request *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*. As in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, where he appeals to Christian brothers and sisters and speaks in the name of the Lord, the authority of the Lord himself stands behind the entreaty. In biblical thought generally, name and person are interchangeable. The exhortation to concord, then, is not Paul's personal preference to be weighed and considered, but made as *an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God* (1:1). Paul speaks here as the Lord's representative (as in 1 Cor. 5:3). In view of the fact that the Corinthians' Christian

29. Ciampa and Rosner, "1 Corinthians" and Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination*.

30. Gk. ἀδελφοί, a gender-inclusive term.

31. Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 70.

32. Garland's statistics: 39 out of 133 uses in the Pauline corpus.

33. On the other hand, as Plutarch, *Moralia* 481 B-E, points out, "while brotherly love in family life is a huge support, enmity within the family is especially painful" (reported by Thiselton, 116).

34. Schrage, 1:137.

identity is so bound up with the Lord Jesus, as Paul taught in vv. 4-9, and given that the Corinthians were baptized into Christ's name (1:13-15), it is entirely appropriate that his name be invoked when the subject of unity is broached. Unity in a local church cannot be based on race, class, or social or economic circumstances. The only common factor in otherwise diverse Christian congregations such as Corinth is every member's relation to Christ.

Paul expresses the content of his request for unity both positively (*agree with one another* and *be united*) and negatively (*let there be no divisions*), using stock phrases for political order and peace.<sup>35</sup> *That all of you agree with one another in what you say* is literally "that you all say the same thing." Is it that Paul, to use an English idiom, wants the Corinthians to speak with one voice, or is he literally wanting them all to say something specific as opposed to them all saying different things? If the latter, what might that something be?

Terminology having to do with speaking is common in 1:10–2:16, a unit devoted to true and false wisdom and preaching. Though none of the main commentaries suggests it, "the same thing" he expects them to say may be "the message of the cross" (1:18), the "message of wisdom" that Paul "speaks . . . among the mature" (2:6). If they did this, it would solve their problems of division, as the following chapters demonstrate, for the cross levels everyone, excluding boasting in human leaders, and then elevates everyone to a point of legitimate boasting in God. This interpretation fits with the NJB: "That you all be in agreement in what you profess."

However, Paul's use of the particular verb in question suggests a more specific answer to the question, What is "the same thing" they are all supposed "to say"? Apart from in 1:10, "to say"<sup>36</sup> appears only four more times in the unit: twice in 1:12 and once each in 1:15 and 3:4. In the two cases of the Corinthians' "saying" something, it is the different "party slogans" that they say: "One of you *says*, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'" (1:12);<sup>37</sup> "For when one *says*, 'I follow Paul,' and another, 'I follow Apollos,' . . ." (3:4).<sup>38</sup> Plainly, the different things the Corinthians are "saying" concern their inappropriate allegiances to human leaders. Paul wants them to stop saying these different things and instead to "say the same thing." Thus Moffatt's translation (of "that you all say the same thing"), "drop those party cries," though interpretive, can be validated exegetically. Depending on how the fourth slogan in 1:12

35. See M. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 68-80, and Fee, 52-54.

36. Gk. λέγω.

37. 1 Cor. 1:12 also has the verb for what Paul says to them, and 1:15 has someone saying something to the Corinthians.

38. When the elided forms are included, the verb appears twice as an explicit reference to the different things the Corinthians are "saying," and another three or four times implicitly. The number depends on whether "I follow Christ" in 1:12 is Pauline irony — see the comments on 1:12.

is understood, “the same thing” Paul wants them to “say” may well be “I follow Christ.” In 3:23 he says as much: “you [plural] are of Christ.”<sup>39</sup>

Either way, the *divisions* Paul opposes are caused by the rivalries he addresses in v. 12. The Greek word in question is similar to the English “schism,”<sup>40</sup> which is sometimes used in translations but can be misleading. As Mitchell explains, “schisms” “need not mean ‘parties’ with fixed membership, ideologies and structures, as in the modern sense of the term.”<sup>41</sup> We discuss the nature of the *divisions* in the comments on v. 12. Whatever that might be, Paul insists that *there be no divisions among you*. As Thiselton translates the injunction, he wants them to “take the same side.”

A further repetition of the same request appears at the end of the verse: *that you be perfectly united*<sup>42</sup> *in mind and thought*. To be “united” or “restored”<sup>43</sup> was a surgical term for setting bones and was aptly used as a metaphor for “resetting” broken relationships and reconciling factions.<sup>44</sup> Paul had occasion to use the word again in a similar context with the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 13:11: “*Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace.*”

The last two phrases in the verse are variously translated. Both *mind* and *thought* have wide semantic ranges: “mind and judgment” (KJV); “mind and purpose” (NRSV); “beliefs and judgments” (NJB); “mind-set and consent” (Thiselton).<sup>45</sup> The force of the two terms shifts according to context. Whereas “mind” in 1 Corinthians 2:16, “we have the mind of Christ,” means “outlook” or “attitude,” the same term in 1 Corinthians 14:14, “my mind is unfruitful,” has the sense of rational reflection. Thiselton’s “mind-set” in the present context “draws out the meaning of outlook, stance, orientation, or attitude, without entirely losing the dimension of rational judgment which is nearly always implicit.”<sup>46</sup> Paul wants the Corinthians to adopt “the Chris-

39. Paul’s use of λέγω elsewhere in the unit suggests that taking the words as political idioms (e.g., Lightfoot, *Notes*, 151: “We have here a strictly classical expression. It is used of political communities which are free from factions”; cf. NIV: “that all of you agree”; NRSV: “that all of you be in agreement”), while helpful in locating their usual setting, might be missing something in their context in 1 Corinthians. Paul literally wants them “all to say the same thing.” The context makes it clear that his goal is to get them to be in agreement in a single-minded loyalty to Christ rather than to other leaders in a way that would be consistent with all of them saying that they follow Christ. Paul’s ultimate concern, of course, is not the adoption of a common mantra, as if that by itself would solve their problem. Either way, it is the change of direction and behavior that belonging to Christ represents that is Paul’s main concern.

40. Gk. σχίσματα.

41. M. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 71.

42. Here *be perfectly united* reflects a perfect subjunctive periphrasis (ἦτε κατηρησμένοι) which, like the synthetic perfect form, typically intimates an ongoing state of affairs, suggesting Paul’s desire for the church to experience a state of unity and harmony rather than continuing in its current divided state.

43. Gk. καταρτίζω.

44. M. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 74-75.

45. Gk. νοῦς and γνώμη.

46. Thiselton, 119.

tian attitude or way of thinking."<sup>47</sup> He also wants them to be perfectly united in *thought*, which here refers not so much to cognitive uniformity but to a voluntary willingness to act for the good of everyone (cf. 8:1–9:27). The term is translated “consent” in Philemon 14.

## 2. Report of Factionalism, 1:11-12

**1:11** The reason Paul knows of their “divisions” is that he has been reliably *informed*.<sup>48</sup> It is not that he has merely been told something which may or may not be true. The same verb is used in 1 Corinthians 3:13 with the sense of something being “revealed” or “made clear.” The report has come from *Chloe’s household*. Literally, “those of Chloe” may refer to members of her *household* (including family members, servants, slaves, and clients), as in TNIV, or even more broadly to “Chloe’s people” (NRSV), meaning her business associates and agents. The reference is probably to her slaves, employees, or partners traveling between Ephesus and Corinth on her behalf. Chloe may have been a widow, since, as Theissen notes, members of a family were normally identified through the name of the father rather than the mother.<sup>49</sup> That Paul uses her name suggests that she and her relatives or associates belong to the church in Ephesus and have regular links with Corinth. Both cities were vibrant centers for trade.

The disturbing report they bring is of *quarrels*<sup>50</sup> in the church in Corinth. A frequent term in Paul’s vice lists (Rom. 1:29; 13:13; Gal. 5:20; 1 Tim. 6:4; Titus 3:9), *quarrels* refers to “hot dispute, the emotional flame that ignites whenever rivalry becomes intolerable.”<sup>51</sup> TNIV usually translates the word in the singular as “strife.” “Dissension,” “rivalry,” or “wrangling” are other ways of translating the word here. Obviously the report consisted of more than one word. 2 Corinthians 12:20, which includes the word, gives some indication of the sort of problems which Paul may have heard were plaguing the church in Corinth: “For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be. . . . I fear that there may be *quarreling*, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.”

**1:12** Paul explains something more of the nature of the reported “divisions” and “quarrels.” The Corinthians were divided, rallying around particular figures whom they held to be superior to the others. Such a personality-focused approach to leadership, with its emphasis on the high rank of the leader and the status conferred on the follower, betrays the in-

47. BAGD, 163.

48. Gk. δηλώω.

49. Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (trans. John H. Schutz; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 57.

50. Gk. ἔρις.

51. L. L. Welborn, *Politics and Rhetoric in the Corinthian Epistles* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 3.

fluence of Corinthian society.<sup>52</sup> The Corinthians made too much of specific leaders and specific styles of leadership. The language of sloganeering is clearly political in nature, but, as Thiselton observes, “while he uses political language for the nature of the splits, Paul draws on Christology and theology for their cure.”<sup>53</sup>

How Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and Christ factor into the situation is difficult to tell. Was Apollos or Cephas partly to blame for the divisions? Are there theological differences between the parties? Was there really a Christ group? What happened after Paul left Corinth? The paucity of clues in the text has led to an avalanche of speculative suggestions.<sup>54</sup> And as Hurd laments, unfortunately the answers provided by scholars are often “determined more by what each has brought to 1 Corinthians than by what he has learned from the letter.”<sup>55</sup> While not wanting to be buried beneath the scholarly discussion or to tie our exegesis of 1 Corinthians 1–4 too closely to any particular reconstruction of the background, it must be admitted that these questions are legitimate for any reader to ask. If we proceed cautiously, some anchor points for a secure interpretation may be recognized from the way Paul responds to the lamentable situation and from our knowledge of ancient Corinth.

That *Paul* might have some in Corinth who were loyal to him is not surprising given that he spent eighteen months there, baptized some of the first members of the church, and, by his own description, was the father, planter, and builder of the community. Two things about Paul’s behavior there may have led some to oppose him or at least to prefer Apollos or Peter to him. Paul’s unimpressive style of speaking apparently had some looking down on him. Additionally, his refusal to accept financial support from the Corinthians, preferring instead to ply his trade (see 9:1-27), would probably have offended some of the wealthier and more influential members of the congregation. Patronage, the giving of financial and other privileges to clients by leading figures in society, was an important feature of Greco-Roman social life. Respected teachers received such support. Paul took no part in this, and his refusal might have been construed as a rejection of friendship.<sup>56</sup> (See the comments on ch. 9 for his reasons.)

After Paul left Corinth, *Apollos* came to water the plants Paul had sown (1 Cor. 3:6). According to Acts 18:24-25, Apollos “had a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures” and “spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately.” Acts describes Apollos as having spoken in Corinth “boldly” and “vigorously” (Acts 18:26-28). To some of the Corinthians,

52. Andrew D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1–6* (AGJU 18; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 93.

53. Thiselton, 118.

54. See Thiselton, 123-33, for a summary of the history of research.

55. John C. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1965), 107.

56. Peter Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul’s Relations with the Corinthians* (WUNT 2.23; Tübingen: Mohr, 1987), 1-34, 133-64, 165-258.

this would have formed a stark contrast to Paul, who by his own admission spoke “with great fear and trembling” (1 Cor. 2:3). As a learned Alexandrian Jew, Apollos may have taught a form of Jewish wisdom which may well have had considerable appeal in Corinth. Perhaps some of those whom he had influenced also disparaged Paul on the grounds that, unlike Apollos, Paul had not taught them in this manner.<sup>57</sup> As Weiss argues, the group which used Apollos’s name may have espoused the wisdom theology which Paul calls into question.<sup>58</sup> The appearance of Apollos’s name six times in 1:10–4:17 suggests that in Paul’s view the Apollos party lay at the heart of the divisions in Corinth. However, as Barrett observes, “Paul never suggests any difference between Apollos and himself, but rather goes out of his way to represent Apollos as his colleague (3:6-9).”<sup>59</sup> Any difference between Paul and Apollos was a matter of style rather than substance.<sup>60</sup> In fact, Paul encouraged Apollos to visit Corinth again: “Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you” (16:12).<sup>61</sup>

As for *Cephas*, Peter’s name in Aramaic, although we cannot be certain, it is likely that he had also visited Corinth after Paul’s departure. Barrett argues for this on the basis of the four references in 1 Corinthians in which Paul mentions Peter.<sup>62</sup> Taken together, these make more sense if Peter had visited the city. In 1 Corinthians 1:12, Barrett contends that the genitive case of the names signifies agencies of conversion, with vv. 13-17 referring to the baptism of converts by those persons named in v. 12 (obviously excluding Christ): “converts tended to align themselves with the evangelist under whom they had been won to the faith.”<sup>63</sup> Secondly, Paul, Apollos, and Cephas may be listed in 3:22 as teachers from whom the community had directly benefited. Thirdly, 9:5 may hint that Peter had visited Corinth with his wife, both of whom enjoyed their hospitality. And in 15:5 Paul may single out Cephas as someone with whom the Corinthians were personally familiar. If Peter had been to Corinth, and some Corinthians had used his name as a rallying point, Paul’s silence in regard to him in his response to Corinthian factionalism, except in 3:22, indicates that the Peter group was not as much a problem as the Apollos party. If Peter himself had somehow been at fault in the Corinthian situation facing Paul, we would have expected a direct and robust response from Paul, as in his disagreement with Peter reported in Galatians 2.

57. Cf. 2:6: “We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature.”

58. J. Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (2d ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910), xxx-xxxiv.

59. Barrett, 43.

60. Schrage, 1:144.

61. For a reconstruction of what Apollos did in Corinth see Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 274-76.

62. Barrett, “Cephas and Corinth,” in his *Essays on Paul* (London: SPCK, 1982), 37.

63. Barrett, “Cephas and Corinth,” 29. While conceivable, this argument is not certain, given that in such a case the church under Paul would have consisted of only two men and a household, namely, those he remembers baptizing.

The *Christ* group is without question the most puzzling of all. Thiselton lists six different explanations. The main alternatives are that some in Corinth saw no need to adhere to a particular human leader and recognized no authority save the risen Christ and that the words *I follow Christ* are an ironic touch added by Paul himself rather than a statement about the specific situation in Corinth. The latter position is supported by Chrysostom<sup>64</sup> and Tertullian among the church fathers<sup>65</sup> and is becoming increasingly popular among modern commentators.<sup>66</sup> The later references in 1 Corinthians to the so-called parties, which do not mention Christ and allude back to 1:12, support the view that there was in fact no Christ party in Corinth: 1 Corinthians 3:4-5 mentions Paul and Apollos; 3:22 — Paul, Apollos, and Cephas; and 4:6 — Paul and Apollos. In 1:12, to quote Garland's paraphrase of Chrysostom, Paul is in effect saying, "All this 'I am for this apostle or that' is rubbish: I am for Christ!"<sup>67</sup> It is Paul's way of underscoring the fact that such allegiances are ludicrous. The tone is no different from that of Paul's absurd questions in v. 13, "Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?" In this sense 3:21-23 comes as no surprise, for there Paul turns the tables and says, in effect, "not only don't you belong to human leaders; they in fact belong to you, *but you* [plural] *belong to Christ*" (cf. 6:19-20). Garland explains further the place of 1:12 in the argument of 1:10-4:17: "The declaration 'I belong to Christ' is Paul's and prepares for his assertions that he knew only a crucified Christ when he preached in Corinth (2:2), that he has the mind of Christ (2:16), that he is to be thought of as the servant of Christ (4:10)."<sup>68</sup>

The main objection to taking *I follow Christ* as an ironic twist is the symmetry of the grammatical construction in which the four so-called slogans appear. Nothing signals a break between the third and the fourth slogans, such as a strongly adversative "but," which would have made it clear that the final words in the verse were of a different order.<sup>69</sup> The TNIV's *One of you says . . . another . . . another . . . still another* is an accurate translation.<sup>70</sup> However, this is not decisive, for if the Corinthians knew of some basis to the slogans of attachment to the three human leaders, then *I follow Christ* would have been understood immediately as Paul's own ironic dig.<sup>71</sup> Christ has been named ten times in the previous eleven verses. The Corin-

64. Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Epistulam i ad Corinthios* 3:5: Paul added "I belong to Christ" "of himself, wishing to make the accusation more grievous."

65. Thiselton, 132.

66. Garland, 49, lists Hurd, Baumann, M. M. Mitchell, and D. G. Horsley. We may add Schrage, Thiselton, and Vincent P. Branick, "Source and Redaction Analysis of 1 Corinthians 1-3," *JBL* 101 (1982), 260, who labels the words Pauline sarcasm.

67. Garland, 49 (cf. Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Epistulam i ad Corinthios* 3:5).

68. Garland, 49.

69. For example, Gk. ἀλλά.

70. Gk. μέν, δέ, δέ, δέ.

71. Contra Vincent P. Branick, "Source and Redaction Analysis of 1 Corinthians 1-3," who thinks Paul's sarcasm in 1:12 becomes clear only in 3:23.

thians are not to boast in human leaders (3:21), but they are told to boast in Christ (1:29-31). Paul's point is that as much as the Corinthians do not belong to Paul, Apollos, or Peter, they do belong to Christ.

The four slogans are genitive constructions amenable to a number of translations. Whereas genitive of possession (e.g., "I belong to Paul"; NJB, NRSV) would be unusual for the first three attachments, it does seem appropriate for the fourth: "I belong to Christ."<sup>72</sup> The "I follow" construction in the TNIV is an adequate description of how the Corinthians are relating to their human leaders. However, Thiselton offers an excellent translation that shows both the flexibility of the genitives and the contrastive particles: "I mean this, that each of you says, 'I for one, am one of Paul's people'; 'I, for my part, am for Apollos'; 'I am a Peter person'; 'As for me, I belong to Christ.'"

The exact nature of the factions is difficult to pin down. The rivalries do not seem to be doctrinal in nature, somehow comparable to Christians today who might say, I follow Calvin, Luther, Arminius, or Barth. Nothing Paul says points in that direction. Elsewhere in his letters, when the opposition teaches something contradictory to the gospel Paul actually encourages factions (Gal. 1:6-9; 2:11; 5:10-12; 6:12-13; 2 Cor. 11:4, 13-15).<sup>73</sup> The "message of the cross" is the cure for what ails the Corinthians, but it is not that various denials or aberrations of the gospel are dividing them. Paul's point is that they are not living in accordance with the gospel. They have not seen its relevance to how they should behave. As Pogoloff quips, "the smoke of division does not necessarily imply the fire of doctrine."<sup>74</sup>

Rather, the Corinthians are divided according to social stratification or class,<sup>75</sup> or corresponding to adherence to patrons in the congregation, or in terms analogous to philosopher/student loyalty, or along with the leaders who had baptized them, or in allegiance to their respective house groups.<sup>76</sup> Winter's general explanation is the most historically plausible. In his view, the factions stemmed from mimicking the secular elitist educational model of the sophists, which promoted a competitive spirit and an attachment to individual teachers. Such orators were of a high social status and attracted large public followings, including wealthy families, which would laud one teacher over another and cause bitter rivalries. This would be comparable to Christians today aligning themselves with Christian

72. Cf. Phil. 1:1: "servant of Christ Jesus" = servant belonging to Christ Jesus.

73. Stephen M. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians* (SBLDS 134; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 99-100.

74. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 100. Cf. Collins, 75, who contends that the fourfold repetition of "I" in v. 12 points to radical individuality as the main problem in Corinth rather than theological differences.

75. This is P. Marshall's view, *Enmity in Corinth*. In his favor is the fact that the only other divisions Paul specifically mentions, civil litigation (6:1-11) and the Lord's Supper (11:18), both suggest tensions between the rich and the poor in the church.

76. Cf. Garland, 42.

leaders whose reputation has been won through their particular style of preaching, whether experienced in person or through other media (books, radio, television, etc.). While we should be grateful for our ability to be exposed to gifted Christian teachers around the world in various ways, it also brings great potential for inappropriate allegiances to form. Apparently the Corinthian Christians picked up on this secular style of relating to their leaders with disastrous results.<sup>77</sup>

### 3. *Reminder of Believer's Identity in Christ, 1:13-17*

**1:13** Paul unfurls three questions further to underscore the lunacy of the Corinthians attaching themselves to human leaders when in reality they belong to Christ (1:12), have been called into fellowship with God's Son (1:9), and are in union with him (6:15).

The expected answer to the first question, *Is Christ divided?*<sup>78</sup> is disputed. Most commentators assume the answer is "no,"<sup>79</sup> as for the two questions which follow. With respect to the first question, the Greek gives no clues.<sup>80</sup> But the answer may well be "yes." Christ, here an allusion to the body of Christ,<sup>81</sup> has been "torn to pieces,"<sup>82</sup> by the divided loyalties in Corinth. Lightfoot defends this interpretation: "Has Christ been divided? This is only too true."<sup>83</sup> The question is effectively a castigation of the partisan spirit in Corinth. Their behavior has led to the unthinkable! Paul uses the same shock tactics using questions in 6:15 ("Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute?") and 11:22 ("Do you despise

77. Winter, *Paul and Philo among the Sophists*, 180-202; idem *After Paul Left Corinth*, 31-43 (cf. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*). Winter appeals to a wide range of ancient sources, including Dio Chrysostom, Favorinus, Herodes Atticus, Plutarch, and Epictetus, and argues that Philo in Alexandria along with Paul in Corinth had to contend with the rise of the sophistic movement.

78. The verb here (μεμέρισται) is a perfect indicative, emphasizing the present state in which Christ might be found. The translation *is Christ divided* is consistent with this understanding of the perfect tense.

79. This interpretation begins with the textual variant in P<sup>46</sup>, Syriac, and Coptic MSS, which have the negative particle μή (signaling a question). Its inclusion is likely a conforming of the clause to the following two questions. The majority of early MSS omit the μή, which leaves the sentence ambiguous as to whether it is a statement or a question, and if the latter, whether the answer is yes or no. Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 479, is right to regard the shorter reading as "virtually certain."

80. In fact, Ambrosiaster takes the sentence to be a statement ("Christ is divided") rather than a question. The original text would have lacked punctuation.

81. So Schrage, 1:152. The definite article with "Christ," a rarity in Paul's letters, links the passage with 1 Cor. 12:12, which shares the same construction: "Just as a body has many parts, . . . so it is with Christ."

82. Calvin, 28. If the text is taken as a statement rather than a question, the result would be the same.

83. Lightfoot, *Notes*, 154.

the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing?”). The verb “to divide”<sup>84</sup> is the same one used to describe the ill effects of disunity in Matthew 12:25: “Every kingdom *divided* against itself will be ruined” (cf. Mark 3:24).

The answer to the second and third questions is emphatically “no”: *Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?* “Surely Paul was not crucified for you, was he?” captures the tone of Paul’s disbelief and scorn. Both questions are introduced in a way that indicates that a negative answer is expected.<sup>85</sup> An emphasis on the centrality and sufficiency of their relation to Christ is obviously implicit in both: “Christ died for our sins” (15:3; cf. 11:24); “All of us were baptized into Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:3). Paul will go on to talk about the “message of the cross” as his central response to their factions. The subtle reference here prepares for the exposition in 1:18-25 and also for his putting leaders in their place in 3:5-4:17 (3:5a: “What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul?”).

The reference to baptism may indicate that baptism was a factor in the Corinthians’ attachment to certain leaders. As Barrett suggested, the baptized may have felt some connection to the one who baptized them. Wilckens and others point out that in pagan religion the convert remained devoted to the mystagogue who performed the rites of initiation.<sup>86</sup>

Paul’s wording is of incidental interest to a theology of baptism. The phrase *into the name of*, which is repeated in v. 15, entails “entrance into fellowship and allegiance.”<sup>87</sup> To be *baptized into the name of* Christ Jesus implies a unique and exclusive relationship with him. It is typical of Paul to point out the relevance of baptism to Christian ethics and living.<sup>88</sup> He reminds believers of their baptism to strengthen their faith, to exhort them to live lives worthy of the gospel (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12), and, so here, to call them to unity (cf. Eph. 4:5; Gal. 3:27). Baptism publicly declares a person to be a member of the body of Christ, a theme Paul develops in chapter 12 (see 12:12-13, 27).

**1:14-15** Some in Corinth may have thought it personally advantageous to be associated with Paul, Apollos, or Peter via the administration of baptism. This type of thinking was rife in Corinth, where personality-centered politics and status-seeking “hangers-on” were the norm in secular society.<sup>89</sup> If so, Paul’s comments in these verses would have given such Co-

84. Gk. μερίζω.

85. Both begin with the Greek particle μή.

86. Ulrich Wilckens, *Weisheit und Torheit: Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu 1 Kor. 1 und 2* (BHT 26; Tübingen: Mohr, 1959), 16-17; cf. Fee, 61.

87. Robertson and Plummer, 13. The Greek preposition εἰς (Matt. 28:19; Acts 8:16; 19:5) is stronger than ἐπί (Acts 2:38) or ἐν (Acts 10:48). Only the first connotes movement into and not simply location.

88. M. Olusina Fape, *Paul’s Concept of Baptism and Its Present Implications for Believers: Walking in Newness of Life* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1999).

89. A. D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership*, 92-93.

Corinthian Christians no encouragement. In what must be the greatest disappointment in Paul's otherwise impressive history of giving thanks, the apostle is grateful that he performed so few baptisms in Corinth! He wants no part in petty rivalries, even if indirectly, and is happy not to have unwittingly played into anyone's hands. In the context of his arguments in the unit, not having baptized many of the Corinthians contributes to Paul's depiction of the nature of Christian ministry as a "shared partnership."<sup>90</sup>

The only two Paul does admit to baptizing, at least initially (see v. 16), are *Crispus* and *Gaius*, presumably early converts in the city. *Crispus* is probably the synagogue ruler mentioned in Acts 18:8. Murphy O'Connor notes inscriptional evidence that this honorific title was bestowed on wealthy patrons who had donated something substantial to the synagogue, like part of a building, a mosaic floor, or other accoutrements.<sup>91</sup> *Gaius* may be the Gaius of Romans 16:23, whose "hospitality" Paul, along with "the whole church," enjoyed in Corinth. Since Gaius was a common name (cf. Acts 19:29; 20:4; 3 John 1; *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 22:2), this identification is not certain.

Since Paul had labored eighteen months in Corinth, one might have expected him to have administered more than two baptisms. Evidence for the size of the church from 1 Corinthians and Acts 18 suggests that these were not his only converts. However, speculation as to why Paul baptized, or mentions baptizing, only these two goes beyond the available evidence.<sup>92</sup> What can be safely concluded is that Paul did not regard baptism to be a sacrament that required the administration of "apostolic hands."<sup>93</sup> Ironically, the next verse adds to the impression that the question of who does the baptizing matters little; Paul finds this aspect of baptism rather forgettable.

**1:16** The parentheses around this verse indicate that it is something of a postscript. Either Paul himself has had second thoughts about the number of those he had baptized, or, as Lightfoot and Findlay suggest, his secretary tactfully jogged his memory as he dictated the letter.<sup>94</sup> Another exquisite possibility is that Stephanas, who may have been one of the first readers of the letter, perhaps in draft form, spotted the inaccuracy and asked Paul to correct it; 1 Corinthians 16:17 indicates that Stephanas was with Paul at the time of writing. In any case, Paul's "come to think of it," or

90. Thiselton, 140.

91. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 267.

92. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 268, puts forward the view that Paul concentrated on these two because, being wealthy, they had "initiative, leisure, and education [and] could function as effective assistants in the spread of the gospel." Garland, 54, thinks that Crispus and Gaius are mentioned because they were "at the root of the controversy as leaders of house churches." The simple explanation that Paul mentions them because they were the only converts he could at that moment recall baptizing must stand.

93. Hays, 24.

94. Reported by Thiselton, 141.

“on second thoughts,” is a delightful demonstration of the candid and uncontrived nature of Scripture, which, though lofty and inspired, communicates its message in a fully human way. Instead of being put off by it, the “messiness” of God’s word is to be celebrated.

Some commentators doubt Paul’s sincerity in this lapse of memory. For example, Garland writes: “since Paul mentions the household of Stephanas again in 16:15 as the firstfruits of Achaia, he hardly could have forgotten them.”<sup>95</sup> It has been suggested that the purpose of the ploy of deliberate underestimation is to emphasize the two particular figures in 1:14 or to stress the unimportance of the baptizer in the rite of baptism. However, the simpler explanation is preferable. Paul did not forget Stephanas altogether, but only temporarily. 1 Corinthians 16:15-17 would be a problem for believing Paul’s genuineness only if he had written it before 1:14. He forgot about him, recalled him, and then wrote of him again. Further, 16:15 shows that Paul is more interested in the conversion of Stephanas than in (the details of) his baptism. The final words of this verse, *beyond that, I don’t remember*<sup>96</sup> if I baptized anyone else, intimate that Paul is being open and honest throughout, and that he regrets (rather than planned) the oversight.

Paul confesses that, in addition to Crispus and Gaius, he *also baptized the household of Stephanas*, “the first converts in Achaia” (1 Cor. 16:15). The size and membership of such a *household* are impossible to determine.<sup>97</sup> It could have been multigenerational and may have included children, servants, slaves, clients, and even lodgers. However, this verse does not provide support for baptizing infants, for “we cannot be certain that infants were included in it.”<sup>98</sup> In fact, even if it did include infants, it would not be decisive, for Paul does not say he baptized every member of the household; if baptizing only believers was the practice of the early church, to “baptize a household” could have meant baptizing those who (were of a sufficient age to) believe.<sup>99</sup>

**1:17** For Paul, not baptism but the apostolic work of the ministry of

95. Garland, 54; cf. Hays, 23.

96. *I don’t remember* reflects the Greek verb οἶδα, which is a perfect tense but, consistent with the emphasis of the perfect tense, functions like a present tense stative verb like the English “to know.” It does not have in mind the dynamic sense of “coming to know/understand/perceive” but, in this case, being in a state of awareness of something.

97. On “households” in the New Testament see Robert Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community* (Surry Hills, NSW: Anzea, 1979; rpt., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 26-36; Theissen, *Social Setting*, 83-87.

98. Thiselton, 142.

99. To say that Paul baptized “a household” may be the equivalent of saying that someone “circumcised the household of Stephanas,” meaning only the males, or an army “raped the household of Stephanas,” meaning only the females. The only unambiguous case of household baptism in the New Testament is that of the Philippian jailor: “he and his whole household were baptized, . . . [for] he had come to believe in God — he and his whole household” (Acts 16:33-34).

the word is all-important: God sent him *to preach the gospel*.<sup>100</sup> Paul restricts his usage of this term in his letters to the activity of duly authorized proclaimers (even in Philippians 1). Key to understanding his perspective is Isaiah 40–65. As John Dickson has shown, “Paul’s usage of gospel-terminology [esp. *to preach the gospel*] was heavily influenced by the particular significations contained in the messenger traditions arising from Isaiah 40:9, 52:7 and 61:1, wherein ‘secular’ messenger language had been transposed to a higher, eschatological level, depicting the end-time herald(s) commissioned by Israel’s God to announce his salvific reign.”<sup>101</sup> Many texts in Palestinian Judaism adopt this interpretation of the word. *Targum Isaiah*, for instance, draws out from the Old Testament the notion that the herald stands for Zion’s prophets: “Get you up to a high mountain, prophets who *herald tidings to Zion*” (*Tg. Isa.* 40:9); “A spirit of prophecy before the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has exalted me *to announce good tidings to the poor*” (*Tg. Isa.* 61:1). Paul’s use of Isaiah 52:7 in Romans 10:15 offers explicit support for making these connections and for taking *to preach the gospel* to refer to Paul’s heralding of the gospel as an eschatological, divinely commissioned activity.<sup>102</sup>

The effectiveness of Paul’s evangelism is not bound to a special style of delivery or in wisdom recognizable by the world’s standards. The appropriate response is to the message of the cross and its content, not to the aesthetic form of the delivery of the message. Paul evangelized *not with wisdom and eloquence*, literally, “wisdom of word” or “speech.” On the contrary, Paul came to Corinth with an antisophistic strategy. He eschewed the neatly packaged eloquence and wit of the orator, who sought glory from the crowds. Dio Chrysostom reported that when he visited a place like Corinth, he was “escorted with much enthusiasm and respect, the recipients of my visits being grateful for my presence and begging me to address them and advise them and flocking around my door from early dawn.”<sup>103</sup> Such speakers put more stock in winning arguments and impressing an audience than in actually saying something of consequence. Paul distanced himself from this model of public speaking, the adoption of which in relation to Christian leaders was in part to blame for the factions in the Corinthian church.

This is the first reference to *wisdom* in the letter.<sup>104</sup> It introduces Paul’s negative treatment of the wisdom of this world in 1:18–2:5, which he will then counterbalance with a positive treatment of the wisdom of the cross and the Spirit in 2:6–3:4. This material does not address divisions in the

100. Gk. εὐαγγελίσεισθαί.

101. J. P. Dickson, *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 176.

102. Peter Stuhlmacher, “The Pauline Gospel,” 156–65.

103. Reported in Witherington, 100. See also Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 182–94, who emphasizes the confessions of loyalty which the sophists expected and received from their followers.

104. Gk. σοφία.

church directly, but rather “the values which lie behind them.”<sup>105</sup> A mirror reading would imply that Paul has been criticized, or unfavorably compared with leaders like Apollos, on the score that he does not speak with the impressive wisdom of sophisticated eloquence.

*Wisdom* in these chapters has a wide semantic range. Barrett explains helpfully that Paul uses the term in two bad senses and two good senses: (1) the skilled marshaling of human arguments with a view to convincing the hearer; (2) the measure of truth, both theological and ethical, by human standards and reasoning (which judges the cross to be foolishness); (3) God’s plan of redeeming the world through a crucified Messiah; and (4) the actual substance of salvation itself. The latter two positive uses find a parallel in “righteousness” as a description of the way in which God acts and the gift that he bestows upon us via those saving actions.<sup>106</sup> These four senses of “wisdom” develop roughly in this sequence as the unit proceeds.

Paul insists that to *preach the gospel with wisdom and eloquence*, in the first sense of sophisticated, impressive rhetoric,<sup>107</sup> would be to *empty the cross of Christ of its power*. *The cross of Christ* here does not just refer to the crucifixion of Christ but is Paul’s shorthand for all that the death of Jesus accomplishes. The context of 1:24b, 30-31 and 2:2 shows that the reference is to more than a mere historical event. Likewise in Ephesians 2:16, “the cross” effects reconciliation, in Colossians 1:20, “the cross” makes peace, and in Colossians 2:24, “the cross” nullified the decrees against us, resulting in the forgiveness of our sins.

How does preaching the gospel in a way that draws attention to the speaker, in an eye-catching way, potentially *empty the cross* of its *power* to save?<sup>108</sup> The following verses, 1:18–2:5, answer this question, with 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 making the same assertion and hence rounding off the section. In between Paul will explain that *the cross of Christ* cannot be presented with human wisdom, and is not a form of human wisdom, for the message concerns a crucified Christ (1:18-25), the recipients at Corinth are not wise (1:26-31), and Paul’s own preaching in Corinth was not in words of wisdom (2:1-5).

In short, the problem of preaching the gospel with *wisdom and eloquence* is that it represents a complete mismatch between message and medium.<sup>109</sup> The message consists of a despairing of self, a “nullifying of the things that are” (1:28b), a comprehensive exclusion of boasting in humans

105. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 119.

106. Barrett, 67-68.

107. Aristotle defines rhetoric as “the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatsoever” (*Rhetoric* 1.1.1); cited in Duane Litfin, *St Paul’s Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1–4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (SNTSMS 79; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 191.

108. Gk. κενόω, “to cause to be without result or effect” (BDAG).

109. This raises the question of whether there are some forms of communication today that are inappropriate for presenting the content of the gospel. For example, some entertainment media may unavoidably trivialize or relativize the message they convey.

(1:29b), and a turning instead to Jesus Christ and to God (1:30–31). The medium of “wise and persuasive words” (2:4), on the other hand, exalts human brilliance and achievement. If the content of the message is not of human wisdom, neither is its presentation. Instead of responding to God himself with “deep conviction” (1 Thess. 1:5), the hearers are in danger of superficially assenting to the persuasive power of the speaker’s *eloquence* (cf. 2:5).<sup>110</sup> It is not that Paul does not appreciate clear and engaging communication. Rather, Paul’s point is that the values surrounding manipulative rhetoric contradict the message of a crucified Messiah. As Judge notes, sophisticated rhetoric “enshrined the beautiful and the strong in a position of social power,” standards which, as Paul will go on to show, the gospel of the cross of Christ by definition opposes.<sup>111</sup>

## **B. Condemnation of False Wisdom: The Wisdom of This World, 1:18–2:5**

Not unlike the pagans in Corinth, many of whom acclaimed the wisdom and power of their beloved orators, the factions in the church of God in Corinth adored their favorite Christian teachers. Paul’s attack on this false wisdom is marked off by the repetition of the phrase “the power of God” in 1:17b and 2:5. Marshall points out that the word “power” was commonly associated with rhetoric and eloquence, for orators could expect to win fame and glory.<sup>1</sup> Similarly today it is possible to describe someone as a “powerful” speaker.

Paul sets out in 1:18–4:17 to dismantle the party spirit that resulted from this adulation. To show that the gospel is the antithesis of human wisdom and power, Paul considers first those who reject the message (1:18–25), then the social standing of those who accept it (1:26–31) and, finally, the conduct of the messenger (2:1–5).

### **1. Denunciation of Human Wisdom: The Message of a Crucified Christ, 1:18–25**

*<sup>18</sup>For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup>For it is written:*

*“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;  
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”*

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Thiselton, 156: “A merely rhetorical or psychological exercise in communicating some belief system remains empty if it fails to engage with the cross precisely as a saving proclamation.”

<sup>111</sup> Edwin A. Judge, “The Reaction against Classical Education in the New Testament,” *JCE* 77 (1983), 14.

1. P. Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1987), 387.

<sup>20</sup>Where are the wise? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup>For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup>Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, <sup>23</sup>but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup>but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

As Paul pits God's wisdom against the world's wisdom in 1:18-25, his main point is not just that humans cannot grasp God's wisdom through their own wisdom, but that human wisdom is under God's eschatological judgment. Paul learns of this verdict from Scripture. Along with announcing the main theme of the paragraph by quoting Isaiah 29:14 in 1 Corinthians 1:19,<sup>2</sup> God's annihilation of human wisdom, Paul also echoes Isaiah 33:18 in 1:20 and Isaiah 28:16 in 1:21-24.<sup>3</sup> All three texts are drawn from the woe oracles of Isaiah 28-33.

By itself, 1:18-25 seems less directly relevant to Corinthian misbehavior than the rest of Paul's argument in chapters 1-4. Given its rhythmic constructions and repetition of key terms, several scholars reason that 1:18-25 existed prior to Paul's using it in 1 Corinthians. For example, Cerfaux thinks the material was originally a scriptural *testimonium*, Peterson, a homily for the Day of Atonement, and Wuellner, an exegetical sermon.<sup>4</sup> However, these approaches fail properly to discern the function of the paragraph in Paul's overall argument. Once grasped, hypotheses of a pre-history for the verses become needless. While it is true that Paul's derision of Jewish and Greek wisdom may well have met with some approval in the church, Lampe explains that this is quite deliberate on Paul's part. The apostle opens this major section with a kind of covert speech that forces the audience to puzzle over its relevance to the subject at hand. Rather than potentially causing an affront so early in his letter, Paul takes his time to build a case by giving some general thoughts to which the Corinthians would largely give assent. The explicit application does come eventually, but not until 3:18-23: "Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

2. Dietrich-Alex Koch, *Die Schrift als Zeuge des Evangeliums: Untersuchungen zur Verwendung und zum Verständnis der Schrift bei Paulus* (BHT 69; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1986), 273-75.

3. H. H. D. Williams, *The Wisdom of the Wise: The Presence and Function of Scripture within 1 Corinthians 1:18-3:23* (AGJU 49; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 47-102.

4. Garland, 71.

5. Peter Lampe, "Theological Wisdom and the 'Word of the Cross': The Rhetorical Scheme in 1 Corinthians 1-4," *Int* 44 (1990), 117-31. Lampe compares Paul's strategy with

The implications of what Paul says in 1:18-25 are nonetheless there for the more discerning, or we might say suspicious, Corinthians. Paul's hidden agenda is that praising the apostles and other Christian teachers is out of the question. If the wisdom of the apostles is a human quality, it is bound to perish. If it is from God, then only God deserves the credit. In place of impressive displays of wisdom, Paul points to the decidedly dishonorable event of crucifixion: "we preach Christ crucified" (1:23). In terms of tracing the argument, v. 25 ties the paragraph together: "power" recalls v. 18; "wisdom" and "foolishness" look back to vv. 20-21, for which vv. 22-25 are the explanation.

a. *The Cross Divides the Human Race Absolutely, 1:18-21*

**1:18** Having rehearsed the situation that gave rise to the letter in 1:10-17, Paul sets about the strenuous task of dismantling the high towers of Corinthian pretension and in its place constructing a gospel worldview founded on the Scriptures. His first move is to give the reason<sup>6</sup> he refuses to preach in "wisdom and eloquence" (v. 17): because the cross signals the end of human wisdom. Paul sets up a contrast between "wisdom of word" (1:17) and "the word of the cross." TNIV translates the latter as *the message of the cross*. The phrase in question suggests both the content of the communication and the act of proclamation, just as "word" in English can mean both what is said and the act of speaking; "proclamation of the cross" captures the two dimensions.

How does Paul's preaching differ from the public speaking of the sophists? Is it just that he shuns the use of clever rhetoric as an end in itself? Litfin argues that while most orators focused on persuading their audiences of their point of view, Paul focused on the issue of comprehension, leaving persuasion to the Spirit.<sup>7</sup> But Paul's stress seems to fall on the unconventional and value-inverting nature of the gospel message. It is not that he does not try to persuade, but he trusts in God's power working through him and his message rather than trusting in his own powers of persuasion, knowing that *the message of the cross*, despite seeming foolish, has divine power that other messages lack.

Paul asserts that *the message of the cross* divides the race: it constitutes *foolishness* to some, but *power* to others.<sup>8</sup> The ancient world was familiar with a number of radical polarities: people were either Roman or barbar-

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the rhetorical mode of speech known as the *schema*. It also has biblical precedent, for instance, in the oracles against the nations in Amos 1-2 which precede and gain a hearing for the condemnation of God's people (cf. Romans 1-3 and the way Paul condemns pagans before moving on to the Jews).

6. Note explanatory γάρ, "for."

7. Litfin, *St Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 261. Similarly, Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 186-94.

8. Though untranslated, this is signaled in the Greek by the μὲν . . . δέ construction.

ian, Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. Society was anything but equal and classless. However, *the cross* renders all of these divisions redundant and obsolete. The only separation that counts is between those who are *perishing* and those who are *being saved*. *Perishing*, a powerful word meaning “to be ruined or destroyed,”<sup>9</sup> is a temporal reference (“those in the process of perishing”) rather than being determinative (“those who will perish ultimately”).<sup>10</sup> The present tense represents the activity as in process.<sup>11</sup> In other words, *perishing* refers to the present road those who reject *the message* are on and not necessarily to their final destiny. As Paul explains to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 4:6-7, only God’s intervention can change the state of *those who are perishing*: “this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”

On the other hand, *us who are being saved*, like Paul’s thanksgiving in 1:4-9, is a positive take on the Corinthians. In spite of their numerous faults, Paul can affirm that God is at work in delivering them. In New Testament theology generally the three tenses of salvation are each essential and true. Christ and the cross have saved us, are saving us, and will save us. Here Paul chooses the present tense, *being saved* as the best way of expressing the antithesis with *perishing*.<sup>12</sup> The tragedy of the two groups is that while one recognizes its true standing, the other is unaware. What distinguishes them is their response to *the message of the cross*.

The first group is defined by its negative assessment of *the message of the cross* as *foolishness*.<sup>13</sup> The first of five significant uses (1:21, 23; 2:14; 3:19), this term sums up the evaluation the world gives *the message of the cross*. Acts 17:16-34 illustrates this response, with some “sneering” (but others “became followers of Paul and believed”). Here, as in 1:21, not only the content of the message of the cross but also the form of delivery evokes a negative response. Both fail to make a positive impression.

The cross is nonsense to some because it represents such a repugnant worldview. It is an assault on the values of power, glory, honor, and success, so dear to Corinthian and many other societies. Paul’s argument suggests that it is possible, although in reality highly inconsistent (and theologically and morally offensive), to embrace the message of the cross as the basis of one’s relationship with God in Christ while continuing to live in a way that rejects its lifestyle implications as foolishness, preferring to live according to the standards of human wisdom (as the Corinthians were guilty of doing). Throughout chapters 1–4 the cross is presented as both the

9. Gk. ἀπόλλυμι.

10. See the use of the term in 2 Cor. 2:15-16; 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:10.

11. Buist M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 103.

12. Garland’s assertion, 64, that Paul “feels the need to remind the Corinthians that those who are being saved are still on the way and cannot afford to be self-congratulatory” reads too much into the tense.

13. Gk. μωρία.

way of salvation and a way of life. As unpalatable as it sounds, in Romans 8:17 and Philippians 3:10 Paul makes it clear that followers of Jesus must share his sufferings. The climax to the unit in 4:9-13 applies this paradigm of self-giving for the sake of others to the very apostles the Corinthians adulate. It is Paul's contention throughout the section that those whose perspective is centered on the cross find the ultimate solution to factionalism.

If the first group regards the cross as foolishness, the second knows it to be *the power of God*. The cross was a shocking image in the ancient world — of evil, shame, rejection, and punishment.<sup>14</sup> Carson thinks that an equivalent image today might be a Hiroshima cloud or an Auschwitz gas chamber.<sup>15</sup> Thus for a cross to be a positive or significant thing is deeply ironic, even paradoxical. For Paul to equate it with *the power of God* would have seemed strange indeed. The power of God is the effective action of God, the exercise of his authority, with regard to something or someone for a specific purpose. To be “powerful” in this sense is to have special competence in performing some function, to carry it off successfully. Hence Apollos is “powerful in the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24), meaning that he is competent in his use of them. As Thiselton notes, the phrase here indicates that “[t]he cross constitutes the point at which, and/or the means through which, God's presence and promise become operative as that which actualizes and transforms.”<sup>16</sup> Significantly, in the Old Testament God's word is closely tied to his power (e.g., Jer. 29:23; cf. Wis. 18:14-16).<sup>17</sup> His powerful acts of creation and redemption regularly involve his word. In v. 18 the word of the cross is the *power of God* in the sense that God's intention to defeat evil, to make himself known, and to save those who believe will certainly be brought to completion. In other words, he is able to deliver on his promise that is the gospel.

**1:19** In announcing God's sentence of judgment on human wisdom, Paul cites Isaiah 29:14 to show that there is implacable opposition between human wisdom and the “message of the cross.”<sup>18</sup> The quotation in question helps establish that this observation is linked to the Old Testament narrative of judgment and grace and shows that the paradox of the

14. Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

15. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry*, 12.

16. Thiselton, 156.

17. Garland, 62.

18. The text is quoted verbatim except that the final word has been changed from κρύψω, “hide,” in the LXX to ἀθετήσω, “frustrate,” in 1 Cor. 1:19. As Christopher D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature* (SNTSMS 74; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 186, notes, the latter term serves Paul's purposes better: “Paul's point in 1 Cor 1.18-29 is not that God has simply ‘hidden’ understanding from the ‘wise,’ but rather that he has done a work in the death of Jesus that defies all purely rational understanding. By substituting the stronger ἀθετήσω, Paul creates a chiasmic parallel with the preceding ἀπολῶ [destroy] that serves to drive home his point to his readers.”

cross, foolishness to some but in reality power for salvation, is in accord with Scripture.<sup>19</sup>

Several features of Isaiah 29:14 and its surrounding verses suggest its attractiveness to Paul and its aptness in relation to his argument. Part of a woe oracle condemning various human practices (cf. 29:1, 3), the previous verse associates wisdom with “lip service,” “people drawing near [to God, only] with their mouths.” The first part of v. 14 indicates that the judgment of the “wisdom of the wise” will occur when God will do “shocking and amazing” things. The threefold appearance of the Hebrew root for “wonder” in this verse may imply messianic involvement. The first name of the messianic figure in Isaiah 9:6 is “wonderful” (cf. 25:1), and in 28:29 the Lord who announces the plan of salvation is said to be “wonderful in counsel.” Furthermore, that the Messiah should be associated with the judgment of human wisdom is suggested by Cyrus, who is a type of the Messiah and is involved in the reversal of wisdom in 44:25.

A wide range of Jewish texts, all of which have affinities with Isaiah 29:14, treat the theme of the absence and judgment of human wisdom (Bar. 3:9-14; 2 *Baruch* 48:31-37; 70:3-6; 4 *Ezra* 5:9-13; 13:29-32; 1 *Enoch* 39:8; 42; 1Q27 1 i 1-9; 1QH iii 12-17; 3 *Macc.* 6:19-29; *Targum Isaiah* 29:13-14).<sup>20</sup> In these texts the absence of wisdom occurs in situations where strife and division are plaguing a community. Under such circumstances, God’s people are enjoined to appreciate the future intervention of God in order to help sort out their present difficulties. In particular, a dearth of wisdom is seen as part of a great judgment or as a sign pointing to the final, universal judgment. The absence of wisdom and its ultimate judgment are associated with the work of the coming Messiah.

Isaiah 29:14 seems to have exerted an influence on Paul’s language and thought at various points in the surrounding verses. “Those who are being destroyed” in v. 18 anticipates the “destruction” in v. 19.<sup>21</sup> A purely verbal show of piety, the very thing Paul faults the Corinthians for in chapters 1-4, recalls the superficial “lip service” of Isaiah 29:13. Most significantly, the “wonderful” and yet “shocking” things (29:13-14) the prophet foretells, with messianic overtones, are what Paul declares have now transpired through Christ crucified.

Paul uses Isaiah 29:14 to announce that God’s eschatological judgment and salvation are taking place among the Corinthians. As Hays puts it, “God has already put the wise to shame through the foolishness of the cross, the apocalyptic event that has shattered the old order of human wis-

19. This is the first time in the letter that Paul uses the introductory formula *it is written* to introduce a quotation from Scripture. The formula uses a perfect indicative verb (γέγραπται). This verb is always translated to reflect the idea of a present stative concept (“it is written”) in keeping with the focus of the perfect tense. The use of the formula also tends to highlight the importance and authority of the quoted text.

20. H. H. D. Williams, *The Wisdom of the Wise*, 61-73.

21. Gk. ἀπολώ.

dom."<sup>22</sup> The Corinthians who still value "the wisdom of the wise" have failed to notice God's apocalyptic judgment on such wisdom through the crucified Messiah, or the inherent contradiction between that version of wisdom and the one to which they owe their redemption in Christ. The fact that in 1:18 people are still in the process of being saved (or destroyed) indicates that the unfolding of the drama of salvation is not yet complete. Thus Isaiah's words are for Paul not just a judgment on ancient Judean leaders, but also "an indictment of the rhetorical affectations of the Corinthians."<sup>23</sup>

**1:20** The four questions of this verse confirm the teaching of the Old Testament in v. 19. Not surprisingly, then, they also betray the influence of Scripture. Robertson and Plummer label the presence of Isaiah 33:18 in v. 20 "a very free citation from the general sense."<sup>24</sup> Although commentators have suggested the influence of other texts, from both the Old Testament and postbiblical sources, the proposal that v. 20 echoes the Isaiah text is the most plausible. Both Isaiah 33:18 and 1 Corinthians 1:20 contain three questions beginning with the word "where,"<sup>25</sup> the only two places where this structure appears in the LXX and New Testament. Both texts refer to the ineffectiveness of individuals who oppose God's people. Finally, both contain rhetorical questions expecting the response, "nowhere."

Isaiah 33:18 concerns the whereabouts of the chief officer, the one who weighed the tribute and the one who counted the towers, a composite reference to the oppressors of God's people. It announces the end of their ascendancy and dominance. The surrounding context refers to an ideal king, probably the messiah, who will overthrow the oppressors (33:17, 21-22). In related early Jewish texts the oppressors disappear following a great judgment.<sup>26</sup> In fact, the End Time is characterized by their absence and by the presence of a messianic ruler. Intriguingly, the absence of the oppressors coincides with the failure of human plans and the disappearance of wisdom. In this light, the echo of Isaiah 33:18 in 1 Corinthians 1:20 recalls the overthrow by the Messiah of all those who oppose God and his people in the End Time, reinforcing both the passage's Christology and eschatology.

Consonant with this background, the first three questions in v. 20 are more derisive than taunting in tone. They are not invitations for "all comers" to enter the fray, but cries of the victor after the battle has been fought and won. The *wise*, the *teacher of the law*, and the *philosopher of this age* are nowhere to be found, for their wisdom has been destroyed and their intelligence frustrated (1:19). They have been outsmarted and upstaged. They have nothing more to offer. They have slunk away in defeat.

But precisely who is intended by each of the three categories of persons is less clear. Many commentators argue that the terms are parallel and

22. Hays, *Conversion of the Imagination*, 403-4.

23. Hays, *Conversion of the Imagination*, 404.

24. Robertson and Plummer, 19.

25. Gk. ποῦ.

26. See H. H. D. Williams, *The Wisdom of the Wise*, 73-80.

comprehensive, each referring to all people. Ellicott takes the first as a general reference to all, then the next two as specific references to Jews and Greeks. Lightfoot and Fee understand Paul to be referring to the Greek philosopher, the Jewish scribe, and a third comprehensive category. Wilckens sees Paul's targets as the Greek sage, Jewish theology, and Greek philosophy respectively.<sup>27</sup> An identification of the first two with Greeks and Jews is supported by the reference to Greeks who look for wisdom and Jews who seek miraculous signs in 1:22. The third may then be best understood as a general reference to both in the light of its being the longest of the three. In all sorts of literature the third part is climactic in lists comprising three elements. Alternatively, Judge sees the third as honing in on the specific Corinthian infatuation; the three groups are types of tertiary scholars: the rationalistic scholar, the Jewish legal expert, and the rhetorician.<sup>28</sup> Paul's language reminds us that Christian members of the cultural elite (counselors, lawyers, philosophers, and the like) must be vigilant concerning the danger of unthinkingly adopting the dominant paradigms for their work (in terms of why they do what they do, what ends it might serve, etc.). The wisdom of the cross judges the values of the world, and Christians in all walks of life must live in ways that are consistent with it.

In any case, the three groups would have been regarded as the experts in their fields of learning. The temptation to pride, to look down on others less learned, in such individuals is easy to understand. In this sense 1:19-20 gives the first hint that, in Paul's view, the Corinthians have a problem with pride, which becomes clear in chapters 3-4 and then later in the letter. Ignatius, *To the Ephesians* 18:1, follows up an allusion to 1 Corinthians 1:20 with another question: "Where is the boasting of the so-called shrewd?" As Garland points out, Paul's three questions parallel Jesus' thanksgiving to God for hiding "these things" from the wise and learned and revealing them to "babes" (Matt. 11:25).<sup>29</sup> Ironically, those who think they are "in the know" may miss out on the truth in matters theological and ethical, where knowing is less a matter of intellect than of a humble character and pure motives.<sup>30</sup>

Paul's fourth question is framed so as to expect to be answered in the affirmative:<sup>31</sup> God has indeed *made foolish the wisdom of the world*.<sup>32</sup> The

27. Wilckens, *Weisheit und Torheit*, 28.

28. Judge, "Reaction against Classical Education," 11.

29. Garland, 65.

30. Many scholars have tried to identify the specific form of wisdom that Paul is critiquing. Proposals include the Jewish wisdom tradition, Hellenistic Jewish wisdom traditions reflected in Philo, and early forms of Gnosticism. Such specific identifications are, however, unwarranted. Paul's critical assessment of wisdom is not limited to one manifestation (cf. Collins, 97).

31. It is introduced by Gk. οὐχι.

32. A minor textual problem attaches to the final phrase. The Textus Receptus, upon which the KJV is based, and some later witnesses have "wisdom of *this* world." A few early versions also have the longer reading. Scribes may have been influenced by "philoso-

*world* here refers to the world order opposed to God, which is driven by lust, greed, and pride (1 John 2:16). The third question's philosopher of *this age* makes the same qualification. *This age* stands in contrast to the next age ("the age to come" in Jewish parlance), the age of God's final redemption, to which believers belong and are headed. This adds another apocalyptic note that underscores the ephemeral quality of human wisdom, for "the world in its present form is passing away" (1 Cor. 7:31). Both phrases confirm that Paul is not attacking reason in and of itself, but rather reason "flawed by 'epistemic vices' of instrumental manipulation and self-deception,"<sup>33</sup> reason blinded by pride. God has made a fool of such wisdom, exposing it as self-serving and illusory.

**1:21** Opening with the conjunctions *for since*, this verse explains the way in which God has made a fool of "the wisdom of the world" (v. 20b).<sup>34</sup> Paul attributes the failure of *the world*, here, as in the previous verse, meaning "humanity in its fallen, depraved state," a world order opposed to God, to come to *know*<sup>35</sup> God through its wisdom to God's own wisdom. Seemingly, then, it is God's own design to prevent the wise from knowing him! At first blush this may appear arbitrary and even cavalier on God's part. Why would God intentionally frustrate those intent on knowing him? It is a step further than saying what Paul said in Lystra in Acts 14:16: "In the past, he [God] let all nations go their own way." Here he deliberately blocks their way to him.

Yet there is wisdom in not allowing human wisdom to be the key to knowing God. "In the cross, God puts both Jew and Greek, wise and foolish, trained and untrained, on the same level, canceling out all human enlightenment on the subject of salvation or redemption."<sup>36</sup> Those who know God are not to be congratulated for their astute insight and perceptive understanding. In finding God they were no wiser than anyone else. In looking for God's action in the world the wise have no advantage since what God does to make himself known, especially at the cross, is so unexpected and enigmatic. It is strange, to say the least, that the all-powerful creator would choose a shameful execution to redeem the world. 1 Corinthians 1:21a is thus equivalent to Paul's insistence in Romans that God shows no

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pher of *this age*" earlier in the verse. Alternatively, it may be a deliberate change to underscore that Paul does not oppose all rationality, but only that characteristic of the present world order. This may be the reason why REB has "wisdom of this world," which may not be a preference for the longer textual reading.

33. Thiselton, 166.

34. Gk. ἐπειδὴ γάρ.

35. *Did not know him* reflects an aorist indicative verb (Gk. ἔγνω). The verb γινώσκω can have a dynamic sense (as in "arrive at a knowledge of" or "acquire information" [BDAG]) or a stative sense (as in "be aware of"). The perfective verbal aspect of the aorist tense-form often combines with stative verbs to express the entrance into a state. An inceptive idea is likely here even if the dynamic lexical idea is in mind. Either way the idea would be that "the world did not come to know God through wisdom." Fee also labels it inceptive.

36. Garland, 67.

partiality.<sup>37</sup> Romans 11:32 puts the matter even more firmly than 1 Corinthians 1:21a: "For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all." As Paul will explain in v. 21b, when it comes to knowing God, the nub of the issue is trust, not wisdom.

Having removed any advantage the wise may have thought they had in knowing God, *God was pleased* to provide a different way of knowing him. The verb "to be well pleased"<sup>38</sup> is used in other parts of the New Testament to refer to stupendous things that God does against all expectation. Significantly, they are all in connection with his Son. God was pleased with his Son at his baptism (Mark 1:11; Matt. 17:5; 2 Pet. 1:17). He was pleased to give the kingdom of his Son to "the little flock" (Luke 12:32). He was pleased to reveal his Son in Paul so that the apostle might preach to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15-16). He was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in the Son (Col. 1:19). He was pleased to predestine the elect for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5). He was pleased to make known the mystery of his will which he purposed in Christ (Eph. 1:9). And here in 1 Corinthians 1:21, *God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe* in his Son.<sup>39</sup> Far from his being reluctant or indifferent, it gives God the greatest pleasure to redeem us.

That knowing God *through* preaching is the solution to the problem of not knowing God *through* the wisdom of the world is signaled by the use of the same preposition in both clauses.<sup>40</sup> One means of enjoying that relationship replaces another means, which had failed. Once again Paul's choice of words to describe the gospel task is significant. In 1:17 his use of "preach the gospel" recalled Isaianic herald traditions. Here "preaching" is a related term that likewise marks his public speaking off from the Corinthian orators who used the skills of rhetoric. Litfin explains that the main terms Paul uses for Christian communication are decidedly nonrhetorical:<sup>41</sup> "no self-respecting orator could have used such verbs to describe his own *modus operandi*." For the role of the herald or preacher was not "to discover the persuasive probabilities inherent in his subject, . . . much less to package the whole so that the message will be irresistible. The herald's task is not to create a persuasive message at all, but to convey effectively the already articulated message of another."<sup>42</sup>

The Greek for *what was preached* could refer to the content of the preaching and/or to its form of delivery. If the previous context favors the

37. Cf. Merklein, 182, who states that the best commentary on 1 Cor. 1:21a is Rom. 1:18-3:20.

38. Gk. εὐδόκησεν.

39. This account of usage favors the more affective sense of "pleased" over "decided" (NRSV) or "determined" (Barrett) as a translation of εὐδόκησεν.

40. Gk. διά with the genitive.

41. This includes not only εὐαγγελίζω ("preach the gospel") and κηρύσσω ("preach"), but also καταγγέλλω ("announce") and μαρτυρέω ("testify").

42. Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 195.

latter sense, the following context supports the former. Both are probably intended, with Paul moving on from his criticism of preaching with “wisdom and eloquence” (1:17) to the message of “Christ crucified” (1:22), itself “a message of wisdom” (2:6). Form and content belong together. In this case both are unimpressive nonsense to the world, except, that is, to *those who believe*, Paul’s favorite term for a positive response to the gospel (cf. 2:5; 3:5; 15:1-2). “Belief” here means “to entrust oneself . . . in complete confidence” with the “implication of total commitment to the one who is trusted.”<sup>43</sup>

A number of Old Testament texts claiming that God possesses all wisdom and power are relevant to vv. 21-24 on a thematic level (e.g., Job 12:13; Jer. 10:12; Dan. 2:23; cf. 1 Macc. 2:59; Bar. 3:9-4:4).<sup>44</sup> A more specific connection to another Isaiah text is of particular interest, a prominent text in early Jewish and Christian circles, namely, Isaiah 28:16, which concerns “the cornerstone, a sure foundation.” Paul uses the text in Romans 9:33-10:14 (cf. 1 Pet. 2:6), where the themes of dualistic predestination and stern warning are developed: perdition or salvation is the consequence of a person’s response to the stone (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23-24). Along with developing these same themes, 1 Corinthians 1:21-24 has some terms that overlap with the Isaiah text: it shares the participial form of the verb “to believe” in 1:21 (in both texts God saves “those who believe”). The use of the word “stumbling block”<sup>45</sup> in 1:23 may also have been picked up from the broader associated “stone” tradition (which emerges in 1 Cor. 3:10-15); the word appears in Romans 9:33 in connection with Isaiah 28:16 and 8:14.

*b. The Cross Outsmarts Human Wisdom and Overpowers  
Human Strength (1:22-25)*

**1:22** This verse, which opens with the same conjunction as v. 21, “since,” has a logical connection to what follows in v. 23. Several English versions, including TNIV, leave the conjunction untranslated, perhaps due to difficulty discerning its significance. However, Robertson and Plummer offer an adequate explanation as to how the two verses are connected with the following paraphrase: “‘Since — while Jews and Gentiles alike demand something which suits their unsympathetic limitations — we, on the other hand, preach,’ etc.”<sup>46</sup> As in Galatians 3:28, the two groups, *Jews* and *Greeks*,

43. BDAG, “πιστεύω,” 2.

44. Hans Hübner, *Die Theologie des Paulus und ihre neutestamentliche Wirkungsgeschichte* (Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 114-16.

45. Gk. σκάνδαλον.

46. The structure of the Greek of v. 22 is ἐπειδὴ καὶ . . . καί. “The repeated καὶ brackets the typical Greek with the typical Jew, as leading examples, in the world in which St Paul’s readers lived, of the ones who are perishing, the world and its wisdom” (Robertson and Plummer, 21-22).

are part of an inclusive way of looking at the world. Both *Greeks* and “Gentiles,” in v. 23, are synonyms for non-Jews. Perhaps Paul uses *Greeks* here instead of “Gentiles” as the best example of a specific culture that searches for wisdom. Alternatively, or in addition, Paul may have used *Greeks* here because it was a Romanized Greek culture that exercised such a formative influence on the prevailing culture in Corinth.

Yet Paul is not commending this search. Verse 23 sets up a contrast to v. 22; Paul says “*but we preach,*” not “*so we preach.*” *Wisdom* at this point in the letter is a pejorative term for human rational inquiry enlisted in the pursuit of success and superiority. The goal for those in search of it is not so much genuine enlightenment as influence, honor, and power. The proclamation of the cross bursts these human pretensions. As in v. 21, it fails to impress the wise in both its substance and presentation. Likewise, when *Jews demand*<sup>47</sup> signs, or “miracles for proof” (TEV), that God is at work, this is not a legitimate, open-minded plea, but an obstinate insistence on a powerful confirmation of God’s deliverance that renders faith unnecessary. Ironically, the cross is in fact a genuine sign and true wisdom from God (v. 24b).

**1:23** To those hoping for something impressive and irrefutable, Paul preaches the altogether odd and unexpected: *Christ crucified*.<sup>48</sup> This is akin to proclaiming as good news that the victor has been vanquished, the market has collapsed, or the holiday has been cancelled. It is only our familiarity that dulls the strangeness of Paul’s message for us. In the most general sense, the “Christ” is the king destined to rule.<sup>49</sup> To announce his ignominious demise is to brand him an utter failure and would hardly seem to constitute a “gospel.” Robertson and Plummer explain the understandable disappointment for both Jews and Greeks at such preaching: “The Jews demanded a victorious Christ, heralded by signs, who would restore the glories of the kingdom of David and Solomon. . . . Christ was not preached

47. Throughout this section, a string of present indicatives is employed to describe the parties involved. These present indicatives should not slavishly be interpreted as expressing ongoing actions in process. Rather, the imperfective aspect of these verbs is being used to portray gnomic (or possibly customary) descriptions, in which a general state of affairs (or a general tendency of a given group) is affirmed: “Jews ask for a sign,” “Greeks seek wisdom” (v. 22); “we preach Christ crucified” (v. 23); “God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom” (v. 25).

48. The perfect participle ἐσταυρωμένον is employed to describe Christ as crucified, which is the content of Paul’s message. The perfect is used to describe Christ in his present (even resurrected) state as one who has undergone crucifixion (cf. John 20:25-27). Paul stresses the crucified nature of his subject. It is Christ *crucified* that Paul preaches. “Christ” is anarthrous in the Greek and can be translated “a Christ crucified” (RV margin) or, better, “a crucified Christ” (NJB). In 1 Cor. 15:11-12 Paul declares Christ raised from the dead to be the object of his proclamation. Obviously “Christ” is what Paul preaches, but here in ch. 1 he emphasizes that central element of his message most opposed to “the wisdom of the world.”

49. For example, in Psalm 2, “the LORD’s anointed” asserts his authority over the (other) “kings of the earth.”

as a conqueror to please the one, nor as a philosopher to please the other. . . . Both had to learn the divine character of humility."<sup>50</sup> As Philippians 2:1-11 indicates, this aspect of the work of Christ has ethical implications. If Christ "humbled himself . . . even to death on a cross," then being "like-minded" and "doing nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit" follow as imperatives for his people. These qualities are the very things the Corinthians are lacking.

As already stated in vv. 18 and 21, *Gentiles*, non-Jews, in general find Paul's message of the crucified Christ to be *foolishness*. Jews typically also found Paul's message hard to swallow. In the second century, in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* 31-32, Justin attempts to convince Rabbi Trypho that Jesus is the Messiah with reference to Daniel 7, and Trypho responds: "Sir, these and such-like passages of scripture compel us to await One who is great and glorious, and takes the everlasting Kingdom from the Ancient of Days as Son of Man. But this your so-called Christ is without honor and glory, so that he has even fallen into the uttermost curse that is in the Law of God, for he was crucified" (cf. Deut 21:23).<sup>51</sup> To Jews, Paul's message was a *stumbling block*,<sup>52</sup> something which causes them to trip and fall. Although the word appears only here in 1 Corinthians, Paul uses it in a similar context in Romans 9:33 and 11:11-12. In both cases an Old Testament citation identifies Christ as a *stumbling block* for Israel (Isa. 8:14 and Ps. 69:23-24 respectively). Isaiah 8:14 in particular gives the flavor of the term with various synonyms: "He will become a stone of offense and a *stumbling block* to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." Together these texts suggest that a *stumbling block* is more serious than simply an insulting affront;<sup>53</sup> it also leads to disastrous consequences.<sup>54</sup>

**1:24** If both Jews and non-Jews reject the message, the group which responds positively is equally inclusive and universal. *Those whom God has called*, another way of referring to "those who believe" (v. 21), are made up of *both Jews and Greeks*. The gospel is for everyone without distinction (cf. Rom. 1:16). Verse 24 recalls the same contrast that Paul drew back in v. 18, between "those who are perishing" and "those who are being saved." This is the fourth reference to "calling" in the letter: Paul is called to be an apostle (1:1), and the Corinthian believers are called to be saints (1:2) and into fellowship with Jesus Christ (1:9). In 1:26-27 being called by God is synonymous with election, being chosen by him for salvation. Paul's distinct emphasis on "calling" in this opening chapter of the letter is another way in which he seeks to deflate Corinthian pride. "Calling" views the entry point of salvation from the divine perspective and consequently underscores its

50. Robertson and Plummer, 22.

51. Cited by Garland, 70.

52. Gk. σκάνδαλον.

53. Cf. "scandal" (Barrett and Fee), "affront" (Thiselton), and "what is offensive" (TEV) as translations of σκάνδαλον.

54. See the comments on the related verb form (σκανδαλίζω) in 8:13.

free and gracious character, further undermining any sense of pride or achievement in those who are saved; *those whom God has called*, though better off, have no grounds for considering themselves better than anyone else.

If some give “Christ crucified” a negative evaluation, the *called* are distinguished by coming to an entirely different conclusion: at the cross they experience *Christ as the power of God* (recalling v. 18b) *and the wisdom of God*. Their response echoes Daniel’s prayer when God revealed to him the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream: “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and power . . . he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and hidden things; . . . you have given me wisdom and power” (Dan. 2:20-22).

Believers may recognize Christ as *the power of God* in connection with his being raised from the dead “in power” (Rom. 1:4; cf. Phil. 3:10).<sup>55</sup> However, it is more likely that it is Christ as “the power of God that brings salvation” (Rom. 1:16) that Paul has in mind. The explicit identification of Christ as *the wisdom of God* is unique in Paul’s letters, though the thought is hardly surprising. It represents the first positive use of “wisdom” in the letter, which, along with the echo of or faint allusion to Daniel’s prayer,<sup>56</sup> anticipates Paul’s positive treatment of the wisdom of the cross and the Spirit in 2:6-3:4.

**1:25** This verse ties the paragraph together, restating its main assertions in memorable fashion. For this very reason its precise connection to what precedes is not easy to pin down. The explanatory conjunction *for*<sup>57</sup> links it to one of three prior verses: Either (1) v. 21 — God was pleased through the foolishness of preaching to save because the foolishness of God is wiser . . . ; or (2) v. 23 — we preach Christ crucified because the foolishness of God is wiser . . . ; or (3) v. 24b — Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God because the foolishness of God is wiser. . . .<sup>58</sup> The distance separating vv. 21 and 25 renders the first view unlikely. The third view has a possible conceptual chiasm in vv. 24-25 in its favor: power, wisdom, wiser, weakness. However, the second view is probably best in that it takes the connection as reinforcing what v. 25 is affirming, namely, that God at his worst is better than humans at their best. Paul closes the paragraph by insisting that the gospel he heralds confounds the wise and overcomes the strong. The power and wisdom of the Corinthian orators pale by comparison. Remembering that human pride is at the root of the divisions in Corinth, we note once again that these assertions are designed to inject a note

55. Cf. Collins, 108.

56. As in Dan. 2:20, 23, recognition of God’s wisdom and power should lead his people to praise and honor him. Those who recognize in Christ God’s true wisdom and power naturally turn from false gods to honor and worship him alone.

57. Gk. ὅτι.

58. A matter of nuance largely ignored in the commentaries, the three views are supported by Findlay, Barrett, and Ellicott respectively.

of humility, as kindred thoughts later in the letter make clear. *Human wisdom* carries the danger of pride, for, as Paul states bluntly in 8:3, “knowledge puffs up.” Likewise, *human strength* is no excuse for, arrogance, for as Paul asks rhetorically in 10:22b, “are we stronger than he?”

## **2. Reminder of God’s Unexpected Choice of the Lowly in Corinth: Worldly Wisdom in the Light of Divine Election, 1:26-31**

*<sup>26</sup>Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup>But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. <sup>28</sup>God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup>so that no one may boast before him. <sup>30</sup>It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. <sup>31</sup>Therefore, as it is written: “Let those who boast boast in the Lord.”*

If 1:18-25 considers those who reject the message of the cross, 1:26-31 shifts the focus to those who accept. In his critique of human wisdom Paul uses the Corinthians themselves as an illustration of the pattern of eschatological reversal that characterizes the work of Christ. The low social status of most of the Corinthians itself points to the cross, which was, humanly speaking, anything but impressive, and radically overturned expectations.

Paul uses Jeremiah 9:24 and 1 Samuel 2:10 LXX to support his contention that through the cross God has turned the world’s values upside down. As Wagner concludes, “[f]ar from being an irrelevant reminder, Paul’s reference to the Scriptural command, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord,’ undergirds and advances his censure of the Corinthians’ behavior.”<sup>59</sup> The paradoxical nature of salvation in Christ turns out, no less than his death and resurrection, to be “according to the Scriptures.” Paul’s disparagement of human wisdom, power, and privilege are rooted in the Old Testament.

In terms of the overall argument, Paul’s point in 1:26-31 is that since the recipients of the gospel in Corinth are not wise, its proclamation cannot be a form of human wisdom. Writing to a city and church obsessed with reputation and honor,<sup>60</sup> Paul risked seriously offending the Corinthians in this insulting reminder of the majority of the Corinthian Christians’ humble roots and social status: he tells the Corinthians, “most of you are nobod-

59. J. Ross Wagner, “‘Not beyond the Things Which Are Written’: A Call to Boast Only in the Lord (1 Cor. 4:6),” *NTS* 44 (1998), 287.

60. Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations, 50 B.C. TO A.D. 284* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 125, points to love of status and honor as a defining feature of Greco-Roman society.