

FIRST CORINTHIANS

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Introduction

Reading Someone Else's Mail: The Challenge of Interpretation

When we read Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, we are literally reading somebody else's mail. This letter was originally addressed to a fledgling mission church, a small band of people in the ancient Mediterranean city of Corinth. No doubt the Corinthian Christians of Paul's day would have preferred that this correspondence not be broadcast to the ages, for it portrays them in an unflattering light and divulges a number of things that they might well, with the wisdom of hindsight, wish to have kept private. Fortunately for us, however, the letter was preserved, widely circulated, and ultimately canonized as a part of the New Testament. Thus, we are given a privileged glimpse of one particular tension-filled moment in the life of the first generation of the Christian movement. The letter, though not written to us, allows us to overhear a fascinating argument in progress.

What are *we* to do with the information gained by eavesdropping on this conversation between the agitated apostle and his refractory followers? How does it speak to us? Paul, after all, was not aiming to write timeless truth or even a general theological treatise; rather, he was giving direct pastoral instruction for one community that faced a specific set of problems in the middle of the first century. For example, was it permissible to eat meat sold in the market if the meat came from an animal sacrificed to a pagan god? What does it mean to take Paul's advice on such a topic, addressed to ancient people in a very different world almost two thousand years ago, and to declare it to be Scripture? What hermeneutical maneuvers permit us to read these particular pastoral instructions as God's word to us? We are so accustomed to thinking of 1 Corinthians as part of "our" Bible that we seldom see the full complexity of this interpretive problem.

To discern *how* the word comes to us through this ancient letter, we must be alert to discovering imaginative *analogies* between the world of the letter and the world we inhabit. While recognizing that 1 Corinthians is not written to us, we learn to read it as though it were. We project ourselves imaginatively into the faraway life of the Corinthian congregation and thereby learn to see our own lives in strange and challenging new ways. The act of preaching (or teaching) such a text in the church requires us to create a metaphorical overlap between then and now and to listen expectantly for God's truth. Since it is *God's* truth for which we listen, however, our work of interpretation must never be confused with mere imaginative cleverness on our part; we can read someone else's mail as God's word to us only because God has chosen—oddly, we might think—to convey ongoing guidance to his people through the finite medium of this specific text. So the church confesses, and so we preach. Interpretation, then, always involves a dialectical process of distancing ourselves from the text enough to see its foreignness and then allowing the text to draw near again and claim us. If this is the task of interpretation, there can be no fixed formulas to follow. To be sure, the church's tradition of interpretation offers rich guidance about how to understand the text. This commentary is informed by that tradition in many ways, both explicit and

implicit, although the format of the series does not allow for thorough acknowledgment of all the ways in which the work of predecessors has shaped the exposition in these pages. Still, different interpreters in different historical settings will produce diverse readings; Paul's letter will shed light from different angles, depending on where we stand. This commentary, then, will seek to offer one reading, offering some suggestions about how the word of God comes to the church today through 1 Corinthians. The specific suggestions offered here for teachers and preachers are intended as stimuli to the reader's imagination, put forward in the hope that they will encourage others to carry forward the task of proclaiming the word freshly: "For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged" (1 Cor. 14:31).

The Setting of the Letter

In order to listen intelligently to Paul's conversation with the Corinthians, we must first know a few things about the letter's setting and occasion. We cannot, of course, know as much as we would like; numerous details of the background are unknown to us, and therefore the text contains many allusions that remain opaque to posterity. In reading 1 Corinthians we see, at best, through a glass darkly. Nonetheless, we can sketch in some information that provides a helpful context for our reading of the letter.

The city of Corinth

Corinth was a prosperous commercial crossroads in classical antiquity. Its location on the Isthmus of Corinth, overlooking the two ports of Cenchreae and Lechaem, allowed it to command a major east-west trade route between the Aegean and Ionian seas. The sea voyage around the southern coast of the Peloponnesian peninsula was considered difficult and dangerous; consequently, merchants shipping goods between Asia and Italy preferred to send their cargo via Corinth. Small ships could actually be carted across the isthmus; shipments from larger vessels were unloaded, transferred on land to the other side, and reloaded at the other port. The economic benefits of such activity for the city of Corinth were described by the ancient geographer Strabo, writing in 7 B.C.E.:

"Corinth is called "wealthy" because of its commerce, since it is situated on the Isthmus and is master of two harbors, of which the one leads straight to Asia, and the other to Italy; and it makes easy the exchange of merchandise from both countries that are so far distant from each other. . . . [I]t was a welcome alternative, for the merchants both from Italy and from Asia, to land their cargoes here. And also the duties on what by land was exported from the Peloponnesus and what was imported to it fell to those who held the keys. And to later times this remained ever so." (*Geography* 8.6.20)

Additionally, Corinth hosted the Isthmian games, an athletic festival second only to the Olympic games in importance. This event, held once every two years, attracted large crowds and generated additional revenue for the city. The importance of the Isthmian games for Corinth may be gauged by the fact that the most prestigious political office in the city was that of the *agonothetes*, the sponsor of the games,

Corinth's prosperous commercial life, however, was interrupted in 146 B.C.E. when the Roman army captured the city, destroyed its buildings, and either executed or enslaved its inhabitants. The site stood virtually abandoned until, on the initiative of Julius Caesar,

the city was re-founded as a Roman colony in 44 B.C.E., less than a hundred years before Paul's arrival on the scene. Many of the colonists were former slaves, Roman freedmen who would have discovered in the newly re-founded city opportunities for economic and social advancement not available to them elsewhere. For example, Roman Corinth was unusual in permitting freedmen (i.e., former slaves) to be elected as *duoviri*, the chief magistrates of the city. In our reading of Paul's letter, it will be useful to remember that he was writing to a church in a city only a few generations removed from its founding by colonists seeking upward social mobility. (In this respect there is a significant analogy between Paul's Corinthian readers and the American readers of this commentary.) We should also bear in mind that the laws, political structures, and cultural customs of Corinth were significantly determined by its orientation toward Rome, even though it was a Greek city.

The older, pre-Roman Corinth had apparently acquired—at least among the Athenians—a reputation as a center of sexual promiscuity: The comic playwright Aristophanes, for example, coined the verb *korinthiazesthai*, meaning "to fornicate." In older commentaries, one sometimes finds exaggerated accounts of the flagrant licentiousness of Corinth. More recently, however, scholars have shown that such accounts represent misinterpretation of the sources. Sacred prostitution was not ordinarily part of Greek religious practice, and Strabo's story of a thousand temple prostitutes in the temple of Aphrodite on Acrocorinth—which in any case referred to the ancient city before its destruction, not the city of Paul's time—has been discredited by historical and archaeological investigations. C. K. Barrett puts the topic of Corinthian sexual *mores* in its proper perspective: "In Paul's day, Corinth was probably little better and little worse than any other sea port and commercial center of the age" (Barrett, 3).

The accounts of Strabo and of the second-century C.E. writer Pausanias indicate that the city supported numerous sites of pagan worship and was adorned by magnificent statues of gods and goddesses in public places, including a large statue of Athena in the middle of the *agora* (marketplace). There was nothing unusual about this. Every significant city in the Greco-Roman world displayed similar temples and statuary. Athens, for instance, is described in Acts 17:16 as being "full of idols." The Corinthian Christians would have been confronted on a daily basis by these imposing symbolic reminders of the religio-political world out of which they had been called. When Paul wrote of "many gods and many lords" in the world (1 Cor. 8:5), his words brought vivid images to mind for his readers. Consequently, Paul was faced with a major task of reshaping the thinking of his Corinthian converts into the symbolic world of Judaism and the emergent Christian movement, in which one God alone was to be worshiped.

From Acts 18:1-17 we know that there was also a Jewish community in Corinth, as confirmed by a passing comment by Paul's contemporary Philo of Alexandria (*Legatio ad Gaium* 281). An inscription referring to the "Synagogue of the Hebrews" has been found in the excavation of the site, but we have no information about the size of the Jewish community, and it appears from the content of Paul's letters to Corinth that most members of Paul's fledgling Christian community were of Gentile, rather than Jewish, ancestry. This meant that Paul was faced with a massive task of *resocialisation*, seeking to reshape the moral imaginations of these Gentile converts into patterns of life consonant with the ways of the God of Israel.

Other information about the social and historical background will be brought forward at pertinent places in the commentary. For further discussion of the ancient sources and the

archaeological investigation | of Corinth, see the collections of material compiled by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor in *S*. Paul's Corinth* and by Ben Witherington, III, in *I Conflict and Community in Corinth*.

The occasion of the letter

Paul had founded the Christian community in Corinth through his | preaching and teaching (Acts 18:1-11); consequently, he describes ; himself as having planted the community (1 Cor. 3:6), or having laid its f foundation (3:10), or even as having "fathered" it (4:15). According to | Luke's account, Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth (Acts 18:11), I sufficient time to develop significant relationships there and to provide I extensive instruction. In accordance with his mission of organizing new I communities, once the church was up and running, he moved on. It is ; likely that Paul left Corinth during the year 51 C.E. and that the letter known to us as 1 Corinthians was written some time later, probably during the interval 53-55 C.E. The letter itself indicates that it was written from Ephesus during the spring of the year, prior to Pentecost (1 I Cor. 16:8). (The chronology of Paul's missionary activity is a complicated problem, and the precise date of the letter need not concern us I here; for discussion of these matters, see the standard New Testament introductions and commentaries on 1 Corinthians.) Paul had been away long enough for new problems and serious misunderstandings to arise within the Corinthian community. From the letter itself we learn that he had written to them at least once previously (5:9); this correspondence, unfortunately, is lost to us, unless a fragment of it is preserved in 2 Cor. 6:14—7:1.

Two convergent factors precipitated Paul's writing of 1 Corinthians. First, he had received a report from "Chloe's people"—presumably members of the household headed by a woman named Chloe—that there was serious dissension within the community (1 Cor. 1:11; 11:18). Their report presumably also included alarming information about other problems within the Corinthian church: sexual immorality (5:1-8; 6:12-20), legal disputes (6:1-11), abuses of the Lord's Supper (11:17-34), and controversies about the resurrection of the dead (15:1-58). Second, the Corinthians themselves had written to Paul (7:1a) asking for his advice about several things. Their letter had certainly posed questions about sex within marriage (7:1b-40) and eating meat that had been offered to idols (8:1-11:1); probably it had also raised the issues of spiritual gifts in the community's worship (12:1-14:40) and Paul's collection for Jerusalem (16:1-4). Whether this letter also addressed the theological issue of the resurrection is more difficult to say. In any case, the convergence of the secondary report with the Corinthians' own letter provoked Paul to compose an extended epistle taking up all these issues and reframing them in light of his gospel proclamation.

The character of his response suggests that he sees the members of the Corinthian church as standing—contrary to their own self-perception—at a moment of crisis and testing (10:11-13). Will they heed Paul's words and recover a disciplined unity in the faith? Or will their community disintegrate before the forces of pride, rivalry, and spiritualized self-indulgence? Paul tellingly remarks, "I do not want to see you just in passing" (16:7); a longer visit will be required to sort out all the problems of which he has been apprised. The letter, then, is a stopgap measure until Paul himself can get there to deal with the issues in greater depth (11:34b).

The Corinthian church and its "theology"

Because our only source of information about the Corinthian church is Paul's

correspondence, the pertinent information will emerge in the course of the commentary. Thus, a lengthy description is not necessary here. Still, a few summary remarks may be useful.

The Corinthian church, founded by Paul, had been in existence for only about five years at the time of the writing of this letter. The community had a few Jewish members, including Crispus (1:14), described in Acts 18:8 as a leader of the Corinthian synagogue. If the Sosthenes named in the salutation of Paul's letter (1:1) is the same person mentioned in Acts 18:17, then at least two prominent Jewish leaders in Corinth had joined the Christian movement. Most of the members of the community, however, were Gentile converts. Some of these, like the Titius Justus mentioned in Acts 18:7, may have been attracted to Judaism before Paul came to Corinth to preach (i.e., they had been "Godfearers," Gentile adherents of the synagogue who had not taken the step of becoming full Jewish proselytes by undergoing circumcision). We do not know the number of Christians in Corinth, but archaeological investigations have provided the basis for some informed guesswork. Because Christians met in private homes and had no public buildings, the size of their gatherings was limited by the size of the villas of the most affluent members of the community. According to the calculations of Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, such houses could have accommodated no more than thirty to fifty people for the common meal. It is, therefore, likely that there were several separate house church gatherings, meeting in the homes of leaders such as Stephanas (16:15-18). Over time, such house church communities might have developed different practices and even acknowledged different leaders, thus exacerbating the problem of factions within the community. If each of the factions mentioned in 1:12 represents a different house church (a possible but uncertain assumption), there might have been as many as 150 to 200 Christians in the city at the time of Paul's writing. It is impossible, however, to be certain about this; there could have been more or fewer. My own guess is that these figures are on the high side.

One thing that we do know, however many Christians there may have been in Corinth, is that they represented a spectrum of differing social and economic classes, ranging from prosperous household heads to slaves. This socioeconomic diversity—highly unusual for any voluntary association either in the ancient world or today—created some tensions and difficulties within the church. This is most evident in the case of the problems surrounding the Lord's Supper, where the "haves" were disregarding and shaming the "have-nots." Other issues that Paul addresses in his letter may also have had socioeconomic dimensions, as the commentary will explain.

The phenomenon of status diversity in the Corinthian church may come as a surprise to those who are used to thinking of early Christianity as a movement of the underclass. This impression has been encouraged by a certain reading of Paul's statement in Corinthians 1:26: "Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were powerful, not many were of noble birth." Clearly the church was not primarily a movement of the privileged classes, but the very way that Paul qualifies his formulation ("not many") should suggest to us that some of the Corinthian believers were in fact wealthy and wellborn. This supposition is confirmed by other evidence, including the interesting fact that Erastus, a city official of Corinth who became part of Paul's mission team (see Rom. 16:23; Acts 19:22; 2 Tim. 4:20), was a man wealthy enough to fund and dedicate a costly public pavement for the city. An inscription found in the city reads, "Erastus, for his aedileship, constructed [this pavement] at his own expense." Wayne Meeks, in his careful study *The First Urban Christians*, has concluded that many of the early Christians were characterized by "status inconsistency": that is, they may have been economically prosperous but not of high status in their culture for other reasons. The

somewhat unstable and anomalous social status of some key members of the Corinthian church may have contributed to the volatility of the community's quarrels.

What role did theology play in these disputes? Critics have speculated ceaselessly about the "theology" of the Corinthians and its sources. Wolfgang Schrage has catalogued at least thirteen different theories about the character of "the Corinthian theology" (Schrage, 38-63). All such theories are hypotheses constructed through "mirror-reading," extrapolating the thought of the Corinthians based on Paul's response to them. One of the most elaborate constructions of this kind is Antoinette Wire's attempt (*The Corinthian Women Prophets*) to piece together the theology of a group of female prophets at Corinth whose activity was, hypothetically, the primary provocation for Paul's writing of the letter. Such reconstructive work can be pursued only with great caution. The few fragments of information that we have do not necessarily add up to a theology, and, given the splintered character of the community, it is methodologically uncertain which people at Corinth might have held the various views that Paul opposes. For example, were the people who said that "it is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman" (7:1 b) the same people who denied the resurrection of the dead (15:12; see the commentary on these passages)? Or do these views belong to different groups within the community? We can formulate guesses about such matters, but they remain nothing more than guesses. Furthermore, it is not always clear that the problems addressed by Paul have their basis in explicitly theological ideas. It is Paul who frames the issues in theological terms; indeed, this is an important part of his pastoral strategy, as we shall see. For example, it is doubtful that the Corinthians thought of themselves as promulgating a "realized eschatology"; it is Paul who uses his eschatological theology to critique various things that the Corinthians were doing. In many cases, the practices of the Corinthians were motivated by social and cultural factors - such as popular philosophy and rhetoric - that were not consciously theological at all.

The brilliance of Paul's letter lies in his ability to diagnose the situation in theological terms and to raise the inchoate theological issues into the light of conscious reflection in light of the gospel. consequently, this commentary will not presuppose any elaborate reconstruction of the Corinthians' theology. As we work through the letter, we will build up some cumulative impressions of what Paul's original readers might have thought, but these impressions will remain sketchy and hypothetical; they will not be used to construct a systematic picture that will in turn govern our reading of the text. What we can analyze with some confidence is Paul's theology as he articulates it in this letter; that is the primary focal point of our interest.

The unity and structure of the letter

Before turning to Paul's theology we must comment on one more matter that has a bearing on our reading: the question of the literary unity and structure of the letter. When we read this text are we really reading a single letter, or has it been artificially constructed by an editor who has pieced together excerpts from more than one letter of Paul? The canonical 2 Corinthians, for example, is almost certainly a composite product of the latter sort. In the case of 1 Corinthians, however, there are good reasons to think that the text printed in our New Testament represents substantially what Paul wrote to the Corinthians on a single occasion. Margaret Mitchell's important study of the rhetorical composition of the letter (*Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*) has argued persuasively

that the letter should be read as an extended appeal for unity. When the text is read this way, virtually all the pieces fit together in the service of a unified argument. Because our concern in this commentary is with matters of theological substance rather than with the formal rhetorical structure of the letter, we will not set forth Mitchell's structural analysis in detail, but the working assumption of my exposition is that the letter should be read as a unified whole.

That judgment still leaves open, of course, the precise determination of the Greek text of 1 Corinthians. The letter is preserved in numerous ancient manuscripts, and these manuscripts do not agree in all details. Thus, critical judgments about the text are necessary. In general, this commentary will presuppose the Greek text printed in the 27th edition of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*. At one or two points, however, we will have to consider the possibility that the scribes who transmitted the text in the centuries following Paul may have introduced alterations or additions. The most important of these is the notorious instruction for women to be silent in church (1 Cor. 14:34-35). I will argue that these verses were not originally part of the letter that Paul wrote; the reader is referred to that section of the commentary for the evidence for this position.

Apart from such technical problems, the letter is to be read as a unity. When we read it that way, attending particularly to Paul's fundamental theological concerns, what themes stand out in Paul's exposition?

Major Theological Themes in the Letter

1. Christology.

Because Paul's letter to the Corinthians deals primarily with their behavioral problems rather than with doctrine per se, the central place of christology in Paul's thought can sometimes be overlooked in studies of the letter. Yet from beginning to end Paul interprets every issue in light of "the testimony of Christ" (1:6). Paul's gospel is fundamentally the story of Jesus crucified and raised from the dead (2:2; 11:23-26; 15:3-5), and he insists that the identity of the community must be shaped with reference to this story. God has redefined "wisdom" through Christ's death and resurrection (1:30), and the meaning of love is exemplified in him (8:11; 11:1). The christology of the letter does not emphasize Jesus' death as a means of atonement for sin; rather, Paul highlights Jesus' role as the initiator of a new apocalyptic age, the precursor of a new humanity set free from death (15:20-28). The exact relation between Jesus Christ and God the Father is not spelled out in 1 Corinthians; some passages express Christ's subordination to God (3:23; 11:3; 15:28), while others link them together in the closest possible relation (8:6; 12:4-6). In any case, it is impossible to understand this letter without attending carefully to Paul's insistence that Jesus Christ has defined the new cosmic situation in which we live and move—and that his self-sacrificial death defines the pattern for the life of the community.

2. Apocalyptic eschatology.

Paul repeatedly seeks to impress upon the Corinthians that they are living in a time of eschatological urgency, in which "the ends of the ages have met" (10:11). The cross has brought the old age to an end, and the power of the Spirit in the community is a sign of God's new order. Yet the community still lives between the times, awaiting "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:8) and proclaiming his death "until he comes" (11:26). As the commentary will demonstrate, virtually every page of Paul's letter seeks to reframe the Corinthians' vision of

existence within this "already/not yet" eschatological dialectic.

3. *Embodied existence.*

Against the Corinthians' tendency to deprecate the physical body, Paul repeatedly insists on the meaningfulness of the body and its actions. Our bodies are created by God, sanctified in the present through union with Christ (6:12-20), and destined for ultimate redemption through resurrection (15:35-58). This has implications for many issues, including sexual morality, marriage, the sharing of economic resources, and the nature of our future hope.

4. *The primacy of love.*

Reacting to the Corinthians' overemphasis on knowledge and wisdom, Paul affirms that love must rule over all other values and virtues (8:1-13; 12:31b-13:13; 16:14). This claim of the primacy of love—which is, of course, grounded in the story of Jesus—sets Paul's teaching apart from the other philosophical and religious options that exercised such powerful fascination for the Corinthians.

5. *The transformation of power and status through the cross.*

As we shall see throughout the letter, Paul repeatedly argues that the gospel overturns the world's notions of power and social standing. Those who acclaim a crucified Christ as Lord find that God has chosen what is "low and despised" in the world to "reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God" (1:28-29). This has earth-shaking implications for the social structure of the community of Christ's people. As the body of Christ, they are linked together—rich and poor, slave and free—in a network of mutual love and concern. Old status distinctions no longer count "in the Lord," and all power relations must be reinterpreted in light of the cross. The Corinthians had some difficulty grasping this vision (e.g., 11:17-22, 27-34), but Paul insists that it is a necessary entailment of the gospel.

Major Focal Points in This Commentary

Beyond the themes that Paul himself stresses, the commentary will draw attention to several second-order observations that emerge from our analysis of the letter. These observations highlight important aspects of Paul's response to the Corinthians situation, and the reader may find it useful to have some of the recurrent ones enumerated briefly in the beginning.

1. *Paul's pastoral task: community formation.*

Paul is not concerned just with individual edification of believers or with doctrinal teaching in the abstract; rather, his pastoral task is the organization and nurturing of a community. His constant goal is to call the Corinthians to understand their corporate existence as the church. One implication of this is that theology and ethics are bound together inseparably in Paul's thought: To think theologically is to reflect about the shaping of the community's life together. A second implication of this observation pertains to our task of interpreting the letter: To read 1 Corinthians rightly, we must hear ourselves addressed *as the church*. If we fail to keep this perspective in mind—if we suppose that we can understand the letter as isolated scholars or "spiritual" persons—we are likely to misread the letter at every turn.

2. Conversion of the imagination.

In order to form a Christian community identity within a pluralistic pagan world, Paul repeatedly calls his readers to a "conversion of the imagination." He invites them to see the world in dramatically new ways, in light of values shaped by the Christian story. Many of the problems at Corinth were caused by the Corinthians' understandable tendency to think and act in ways that were entirely normal within the cultural world of the Greco-Roman city, such as taking one another to court or accepting invitations to meals held in the temples of the gods. Paul, however, calls on them to change in fundamental ways and to shape a different kind of community, rethinking their inherited sociocultural norms and practices, as well as their ingrained conceptions of value, honor, and leadership. Social historians refer to this process of change as "resocialization." Paul elsewhere refers to it as transformation through the renewing of the community's mind (Rom. 12:2). This process of transformation is complex, because not everything in the Corinthians' previous life needed to be changed; for example, Paul insists that marriage to non-Christian spouses should be honored and maintained if possible (1 Cor. 7:12-16). Thus, a detailed process of discernment is required. One important aspect of this discernment and imaginative conversion is for the Gentile Corinthians to learn to envision themselves as the heirs of Israel's story (e.g., 10:1-22).

3. The social location of theological thinking.

The internal divisions within the Corinthian church were in part attributable to socioeconomic factors. Recent scholarship has suggested that the Corinthians' differing views on "knowledge" and spiritual gifts may have been related to class and status differences within the church. Certainly the problems surrounding the Lord's Supper had a socioeconomic aspect. Some who had enough food to eat were humiliating "those who have nothing" (11:22). Throughout the commentary, we shall try to observe the ways in which the Corinthian disputes may be symptomatic of social differences and, just as importantly, the ways in which Paul's interpretation of the gospel seeks to overcome such differences.

4. Paul as hermeneutic theologian.

Paul characteristically reasons theologically by reflecting imaginatively on scriptural texts and traditions. Even in 1 Corinthians, where scriptural interpretation is not the major focus of the argument as it is in Galatians and Romans, Paul repeatedly appeals to Israel's Scripture as a basis for his counsel to the community. In order to follow his arguments, we must attend carefully to his innovative interpretations of the Old Testament texts and to the rhetorical effects created by his use of them. The commentary will give particular attention to this matter, which should be of special interest to teachers and preachers who must themselves consider how to develop their own message for the community on the basis of Scripture. At the same time, we should recognize also that Paul's hermeneutical reflection sometimes begins not from the Old Testament but from early Christian confessional and liturgical traditions (e.g., 11:23-25; 15:3-5). Here too we can learn much by observing his manner of bringing these traditions to bear upon the practical issues that face the community.

5. Paul as model for ministry.

Paul explicitly offers himself as a model to be imitated (4:16-17; 11:1). Throughout the commentary, we will explore what it would mean to take him as a model for ministry and pastoral theology. By way of preview, we can say that the model is both compelling and daunting. Paul attempts to address all particular pastoral problems in light of fundamental theological considerations; somehow he finds that the message of Jesus Christ crucified and

risen speaks to every concern of the Corinthian community. Paul is not afraid of confrontation: It seems that his gospel may *generate* problems, not solve them, for the word of the cross poses a challenge to the comfortable assumptions of Paul's readers. Furthermore, in his relationship with his congregation, Paul will not tolerate slackness and mediocrity; he calls them again and again to excellence—the excellence of love as defined by the gospel—and accountability. Finally, as a pastoral theologian, he thinks with imaginative freedom but with simultaneous fidelity to the foundational kerygmatic tradition, and he urges his readers to do the same. This is a hard act to follow, but those called to ministry in Christ's church have no choice but to try.

OUTLINE OF THE LETTER

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