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## *Introduction*

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Paul came to Corinth for the first time around the midpoint of the first century after Christ. Some time later, when he had departed from Corinth, he wrote his fellow Christians a letter that we now know as 1 Corinthians. Preparing to read that letter is a challenging task, since to comprehend what is going on in this truly foreign communication one must understand a variety of background matters. Given the distance (in terms of time, language, culture, geography, and life-experience) between readers of this letter at the turn of the twenty-first century and the original first-century audience to which it was addressed, even information about seemingly small issues—who, what, when, where, why, and how was the letter written—becomes important for a sensible reading of Paul’s communication. Thus, before diving into the reading and the study of 1 Corinthians, let us briefly come to terms with some preliminary issues.

### *Paul and the Corinthians*

Precisely locating events in the context of Paul’s ministry is a challenge, often a nearly impossible one, because available sources concerning Paul’s life and work are both scarce and vague. Paul’s involvement with the Corinthians, however, is one of the chapters of the apostle’s career about which we can be somewhat certain. According to The Acts of the Apostles, a key secondary source related to Paul’s ministry, Paul moved with his colleagues Silas (or Silvanus), Timothy, and others who are unnamed from Asia Minor to Europe, specifically Macedonia and Greece, to preach the gospel. These “evangelists” were active in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea before Paul moved alone to Athens and then to Corinth, where he was eventually rejoined by Silas and Timothy (and perhaps others). A sketchy account of an eighteen-month sojourn in Corinth is given in Acts 18:1–18, and although the story is but a brief general summary of the work that Paul and his colleagues did in Corinth, one does garner

some important information from the narrative. Paul began his ministry in Corinth by locating the Jewish quarter of the city where he befriended some other Jews: Priscilla (or Prisca) and Aquila. These two were a married couple, and apparently they were already Christians since there is no mention or explanation of the origins of their Christian faith. Priscilla and Aquila had come to Corinth after being banished from Rome under an edict of the Emperor Claudius. In an extrabiblical source by the Roman historian Suetonius (*Claudius* 25) we learn that in or about A.D. 49 Claudius expelled Jews from Rome because of dissension and rioting among the members of the Jewish community. This disturbance was caused by the preaching of “Chrestus” (a garbled reference to “Christ” that most likely indicates the controversial preaching of the gospel in Rome). The couple were, like Paul, tentmakers by trade, and Paul resided with them in Corinth.

Paul engaged in evangelistic missionary activity, at first ministering in the context of the Corinthian synagogue (Acts 18:4). He and his colleagues remained active in this setting until their work aroused sufficient hostility to make it impossible to continue there. The loss of the synagogue as a place for preaching did not end Paul’s proclamation of the gospel. Rather, he simply moved with the other members of the now-identifiable Christian community to the house next-door to the synagogue, which belonged to a God-fearing Gentile named Titius Justus (Acts 18:7). Paul’s success in the synagogue is reflected in the report in Acts 18:8 that Crispus—who was the president of the synagogue (see also 1 Cor. 1:14)—his household, and many other Corinthians heard, believed, and were baptized. Apparently the proximity of the evangelical ministry and its ongoing success continued to generate controversy, for eventually the members of the synagogue community brought charges against Paul before the Roman proconsul Gallio.

Gallio’s involvement with the proceedings against Paul registers an important historical note that aids the effort to locate chronologically the ministry of Paul in Corinth. From various extrabiblical materials, including both a votive inscription at Delphi—the site of the famous oracle and sanctuary of Apollo—and references in several Roman writers, one can be almost certain that Lucius Junius Annaeus Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Roman province of which Corinth was capital, during A.D. 52–53. Gallio recognized the religious nature of the dispute and took no interest in the case, actually dismissing it from his court

(Acts 18:14–16). The plaintiffs, however, were not easily dissuaded and gave their new synagogue president Sosthenes (“Sosthenes” is also identified as the co-author of 1 Corinthians; this may or may not be the same person) a beating to show their displeasure with the outcome of the proceedings (Acts 18:17). Gallio was not swayed by the action.

The story in Acts recalls that Paul stayed “many days longer” in Corinth after the incident before Gallio, but then (Acts does not say why) Paul departed from Corinth. Whether or not he was encouraged to leave is impossible to determine from the account in Acts. Nevertheless, having left Corinth, Paul sailed east and came to Ephesus, visiting there before launching out on a tour of the larger region of Asia Minor. Paul brought his travels to a conclusion by returning to Ephesus, where he lived and worked for a period of twenty-seven months. While in residence at Ephesus, Paul exchanged a series of letters with the members of the church in Corinth and even, at one point, paid them a visit. In 1 Corinthians 5:9 Paul refers to a previous correspondence that he had sent to Corinth and to the misinterpretation of his assertions in that letter. Thus, 1 Corinthians is at least the second letter in a larger series of writings that included a previous communication, 2 Corinthians, and seemingly (from references in 2 Corinthians) still other missives. Moreover, from the way that Paul describes his situation in 1 Corinthians 16:5–9, he must have already been in Ephesus for an extended period, for he delineates plans for bringing his stay in Ephesus to a close. He indicates that he was in the final stages of assembling an offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem, which he intended to take to them personally. When he did this he was arrested and incarcerated for some years as one learns from Acts 21–28. Paul may have died at the end of this imprisonment or he may have been released and imprisoned again at a later time. The historical data concerning the end of his life are minimal and unclear. Given this information, 1 Corinthians is most likely a letter from Paul to the church in Corinth written between A.D. 53 and A.D. 55.

### *The City of Corinth*

Corinth was an ancient Greek city, located at a strategic point on the isthmus that connected the Peloponnesian peninsula to the southern mainland section of Greece (which was called Achaia in Paul’s day) and to the provinces of Macedonia

and Epirus beyond. During the Roman military campaigns of the second-century B.C., in 146 ancient Corinth fell and the Romans demolished the city. A small population lived among the ruins for a century. In 44 B.C. Julius Caesar commissioned the rebuilding and reconstitution of Corinth and secured its success by populating it with an international mix of freedmen. Many of these freedmen were slaves from around the Mediterranean—especially Greece, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt—who were given freedom and a new start in life as a reward for military service. Thus this population was loyal to Rome. From 44 B.C. through the first centuries A.D., Corinth was a prominent Roman colony; various industries, including the prominent bronze and terra-cotta works, were born and grew. This reconstituted or “new” Corinth became a magnet for many persons who were interested in fresh economic opportunities and lively social conditions. The city of Corinth grew and was, despite its reputation for excitement, a peaceful metropolitan area. The Romans named Corinth as capital of Roman Achaia, and the city was the residence of the Roman proconsul from about 29 B.C. With the prosperity of the city reestablished, the Corinthians re-instituted the traditional Isthmian Games, a major panhellenic festival that occurred every two years and focused on athletic, dramatic, musical, and oratorical competitions. In this way they reclaimed the ancient glory of Corinth, perhaps in a form more splendid than originally enjoyed. Trade, travel, and tourism led to the development of a center for banking that added even more prosperity to the cosmopolitan city and its region. Archaeological work done from the late nineteenth century to the present day reveals detailed information about the city, its origins, its reconstitution, its development, and its actual appearance in Paul’s day. As a cosmopolitan center of status, Corinth could boast of an abundance of affluent neighborhoods, rental properties, recreational facilities, and establishments for both public and private dining. Politics naturally flourished in this urban climate.

The geographical location of Corinth made it a vital entity. It bordered on two seas: to the west, in the direction of Rome, was the Corinthian Gulf of the Adriatic Sea; to the east, in the direction of Asia Minor, was the Saronic Gulf of the Aegean Sea. Sea trade and travel in antiquity were always risky business, but this was especially true around the turbulent, unpredictable waters south of the Peloponnesus. Therefore, rather than unnecessarily chance lives and precious cargo to the perils of the sea,

ship-owners, sailors, and merchants brought their vessels to harbor in one of Corinth's two ports and had the ships brought into dry-dock and unloaded or hauled across the isthmus to be put back in the water at the other gulf harbor. This activity was labor-intensive, so Corinth had a large population of manual workers.

Because the goods of both the East and the West passed through the city, Corinth possessed a truly cosmopolitan atmosphere. Fortunes were made and spent in Corinth. The educated, the elite, the entrepreneur, and the entertainer all flocked to Corinth. People of diverse backgrounds brought to the life of the city a rich mixture of cultures, religions, languages, entertainment, foods, and other amenities. Corinth was vigorous and vivacious; the atmosphere was both pluralistic and syncretistic, with distinctive cultures and worldviews existing independently and mixing together to form novel, often unexamined and illogical combinations. Former slaves found freedom and acquired great wealth that they shared generously, so that at times these freedmen were selected to the highest public offices. Cults thrived and devotees made rounds of the temples to assure favor with all the gods. On one street stood together temples to several gods who often represented parallel or competitive claims to power. Such was the city Paul knew, and those among whom Paul ministered comprised its population.

### *The Purpose of Paul's Letter*

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he did so for concrete reasons related to specific concerns. Indeed, as the reader learns from the letter itself, Paul wrote to the Corinthians after visiting with those who were familiar with the church, talking with some of its members, and receiving a letter of inquiry from the congregation. An exact reconstruction of the situation is impossible, but one may gain sufficient clarity about the circumstances to make the reading of the letter in a later context more sympathetic and precise. First, Paul mentions that he had met with a group that he names as "Chloe's people." Their identity is treated below in the commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:11. From these persons Paul learned of at least some of the problems in Corinth that were causing divisiveness in the life of the congregation. Paul expresses shock, alarm, and apprehension at the quarreling among the Corinthians. Second, Paul received

a letter from the church via a letter delegation—specifically Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus—named in the closing segment of Paul’s letter back to the church (see 1 Cor. 16:17). Paul had certainly discussed the Corinthian situation with these letter bearers, and from his reply in writing one can discern those prominent elements of the letter that demanded Paul’s attention.

The church had fallen into arguing, forming cliques within the larger congregation, perhaps over one issue or another, or over a combination of issues that even included the varied social status of the members of the church. Paul’s particular references to the Corinthians’ own letter address such issues as sexual relations, marriage, divorce, the eating of foods associated with pagan gods, the status of spiritual gifts and the practice of those gifts in the assembly of the church, orderly behavior in worship, the resurrection of the dead, and a collection that Paul was assembling for the relief of the poor in Jerusalem.

Seemingly at the root of all these concerns was the desire of certain Corinthian Christians to establish their own spiritual status. The concern with spirituality and the comparison of the spiritual standing of one person or group with that of another took a remarkably diverse set of forms, from parsimonious asceticism to avaricious licentiousness, with many configurations in between. While Paul addresses the specific issues and behaviors, he consistently identifies the will to boast in spiritual arrogance of one’s special rank in faith and practice as the fundamental fault of the people and groups in Corinth. Throughout the letter Paul denounces boasting of human or spiritual behaviors and affirms the goodness and achievements of God and God’s grace at work in Jesus Christ. Coupled with his criticism of the problems at Corinth is a steady stream of positive teachings concerning the meaning of the experience of God’s grace in the life of the individuals and the community.

### *The Structure of 1 Corinthians*

As Paul writes to the Corinthians, one may observe the major and minor lines of his reasoning. The initial elements of the letter are quite clear, forming Paul’s versions of a standard salutation (1:1–3) and thanksgiving (1:4–9).

The main segment of 1 Corinthians begins at 1 Corinthians 1:10, but there is vigorous disagreement among interpreters

concerning where the body of the letter ends. Since Paul uses the phrase “now about” several times in the letter—often as an obvious reference to matters raised in the previous letter from the Corinthians to the apostle—some suggest that Paul’s last use of the phrase “now concerning” at 16:1 is an indication that he is referring to the Corinthians’ letter for the last time. Thus they argue that this use signals that Paul is concluding his response to their inquiries and that the body of the letter ends with 16:12. However, it is not certain that 16:1 is citing the Corinthians’ letter; Paul may well introduce a new topic there himself. Moreover, from 1:10 through 6:20 there is no clear reference to the letter, although Paul is certainly focusing on the situation in Corinth. For these reasons one can make a strong case that Paul’s change of tone and focus in 16:1 signals his transition from the body of the letter to parenthesis. The commentary that follows treats 16:1–11 as part of Paul’s parenetic materials and views 1:10–15:58 as the body of the letter.

Furthermore, there are various ways in which one may view the divisions of the larger sections of the body of the letter. Some commentators envision 1:10–6:20 as Paul’s remarks in reaction to oral reports of the situation in Corinth and 7:1–15:58 (or 7:1–16:12) as his answer to the Corinthians’ letter. However, the following commentary treats the letter’s body in four large sections because I recognize these portions of the letter to be concerned with different themes. First, 1:10–4:21 is a set of reflections on *the gospel and wisdom*; second, 5:1–11:1 takes up a series of *matters in the everyday life of the Corinthian church*; third, 11:2–14:40 focuses on *the need for orderly worship and the practice of spiritual gifts* in the context of that worship; and fourth, 15:1–58 is a complex but unified meditation on *the truth of the resurrection of the dead*. Other patterns of examining the body of the letter are possible, but considering these materials in terms of unifying themes allows us to appreciate the major concerns Paul addresses when he discusses the many specific matters in this letter.

After the body of the letter one encounters Paul’s discussion of several practical matters (16:1–18) and the elements of the formal closing of the letter (16:19–24). In all, the letter is lengthy and complex, and it is helpful to see the flow of the materials in the form of an outline in order to follow the logic and development of Paul’s thought.

- I. Salutation, 1:1–3
  - A. Senders, 1:1
  - B. Recipients, 1:2
  - C. Greetings, 1:3
- II. Thanksgiving, 1:4–9
  - A. The Corinthians' Endowments, 1:4–8
  - B. God's Faithfulness, 1:9
- III. Body of the Letter, 1:10–15:58
  - A. The Gospel and Wisdom, 1:10–4:21
    - 1. Factions in the Congregation, 1:10–17
    - 2. God's Peculiar, Powerful Way, 1:18–25
    - 3. Before and After God's Call, 1:26–31
    - 4. Paul's Apostolic Ministry and Message, 2:1–5
    - 5. Insights on the Operation of Revelation, 2:6–16
    - 6. Working toward Unity and Edification, 3:1–17
    - 7. Evaluating by God's Standards, 3:18–23
    - 8. God as the Only Real Judge, 4:1–5
    - 9. Exposing Inappropriate Boasting, 4:6–13
    - 10. A Paternal Appeal and Admonition, 4:14–21
  - B. Matters in the Everyday Life of the Corinthian Church, 5:1–11:1
    - 1. Concrete Misunderstandings, 5:1–6:20
      - a. Shocking Sexual Immorality, 5:1–13
      - b. Going to Judgment before Non-Christians, 6:1–11
      - c. The Character of Christian Freedom, 6:12–20
    - 2. Marriage, Divorce, and Social Status, 7:1–40
      - a. General Remarks on Marriage, 7:1–7
      - b. Directions to the Unmarried, 7:8–9
      - c. Directions to the Married, 7:10–11
      - d. Regarding "Mixed" Marriages, 7:12–16
      - e. God's Gifts and the Corinthians' Calling, 7:17–24
      - f. Issues and Eschatology, 7:25–40
    - 3. Christian Rights and Responsibilities, 8:1–11:1
      - a. Eating Meat Sacrificed to Idols, 8:1–13
        - i. Contrasting Knowledge and Love, 8:1–6
        - ii. Valid Christian Relations, 8:7–13
      - b. Reflections on the "Rights" of an Apostle, 9:1–27
        - i. The Rights of an Apostle, Their Basis, and Paul's Practice, 9:1–18
        - ii. Paul's Style of Ministry and Its Motivation, 9:19–23
        - iii. The Need for Discipline in Ministry, 9:24–27
      - c. Pauline Preaching: Relating the Exodus to Christian Life, 10:1–13
      - d. Directions against Idolatry, 10:14–22
      - e. The Goal of Christian Life, 10:23–11:1
        - i. The Good of Others, 10:23–24
        - ii. Practical Application, 10:25–30
        - iii. The Glory of God, 10:31–11:1

- C. The Need for Orderly Worship and the Practice of Spiritual Gifts, 11:2–14:40
  - 1. The Community's Worship, 11:2–34
    - a. Keeping Church Customs, 11:2–16
    - b. Problems in the Assembling, 11:17–22
    - c. Recalling the Origins of the Lord's Supper, 11:23–26
    - d. Proper and Improper Attitudes at the Supper, 11:27–34
  - 2. Spiritual Gifts and the Life of the Church, 12:1–14:40
    - a. The Nature of Enthusiasm, 12:1–3
    - b. Unity and Diversity of Gifts, 12:4–11
    - c. The Body of Christ, 12:12–31a
    - d. The Superlative Way of Love, 12:31b–13:13
    - e. Practicing Gifts and Maintaining Order, 14:1–40
      - i. The Practice of Prophecy, 14:1–5
      - ii. The Advantage of Intelligibility, 14:6–12
      - iii. The Desirability of Intelligibility, 14:13–19
      - iv. The Effect of Intelligibility, 14:20–25
      - v. Protocol for Practicing Spiritual Gifts, 14:26–33a
      - vi. Women and Order at Worship, 14:33b–36
      - vii. Confrontation and Advice, 14:37–40
- D. The Truth of the Resurrection of the Dead, 15:1–58
  - 1. Back to the Basics, 15:1–11
  - 2. Controversy in Corinth, 15:12–19
  - 3. Christ, the Resurrection, and the End, 15:20–28
  - 4. Arguments against Misunderstandings, 15:29–34
  - 5. Comparing Bodies and Seeds, 15:35–44
  - 6. The First and Last Adam, 15:45–49
  - 7. Apocalyptic Revelation, 15:50–58
- IV. Parenesis, 16:1–18
  - A. Two More Replies, 16:1–12
    - 1. The Collection, 16:1–4
    - 2. Paul's Travel Plans, 16:5–9
    - 3. Mentioning Co-Workers, 16:10–12
  - B. Some Practical Matters, 16:13–18
    - 1. Principles for Life, 16:13–14
    - 2. Saluting Special Persons, 16:15–18
- V. Final Remarks, 16:19–24
  - A. Final Greetings, 16:19–20
  - B. Autograph, 16:21
  - C. Anathema and Maranatha, 16:22
  - D. Benediction, 16:23
  - E. Passing Paul's Love, 16:24

This outline informs the commentary that follows, assisting the reader of any particular passage to gain a vision of where that segment of the letter belongs in the overall configuration of the letter. At times, however, in the course of offering commentary on particular passages, sections or verses are further

subdivided in more discrete units or, by contrast, they are held together in larger coherent pieces to facilitate the interpretation of the text.

### *Paul's Theological Worldview*

To appreciate the worldview from which Paul thought and taught, it is necessary to understand the foundations of Paul's personal background and religious thought. There is an ongoing debate among those seeking to understand Paul over which background best accounts for Paul's own understanding of what he did and said. Prior to the last two or three decades of study, scholars drew hard lines dividing three areas that were commonly accepted as having influenced Paul. Since he was a Pharisee, Palestinian Judaism was thought by some to provide the key to interpreting Paul. Other scholars argued that Hellenism was the most appropriate background for viewing and interpreting Paul, and a third contingent maintained that apocalyptic eschatology was the best framework in which to understand Paul's work. Scholars now recognize that these three backgrounds are not exclusive of one another and that each makes a contribution to a balanced reading of Paul, for Paul was influenced by and drew upon all of them. Nevertheless, the question remains whether one of these is dominant.

*Judaism* Paul the Christian had once been Paul the Jew. It is clear from both his own letters and the story of his ministry in Acts that Paul was not only a Jew but also a zealous Pharisee. From time to time Paul boasts of his Jewish past as a way of rebutting other missionaries who caused problems in churches that he had founded (see Phil. 3 and 2 Cor. 11). Acts 22:3 preserves a tradition not attested in Paul's own writings that associates him with Gamaliel I of Jerusalem, one of the most influential figures in first-century Judaism. While Paul does not mention this striking association when rehearsing his Jewish credentials, nonetheless the association of Paul with formal "rabbinic-style" education seems likely, for in his writings Paul manifests signs of "rabbinic" style and logic (although the designation "rabbinic" is anachronistic for Paul's first-century Judaism, since the actual office of "rabbi" is a post-70 development and the rabbinic sources with which comparisons are made come from the third century and later). Paul does midrashic exegesis of the Jewish scriptures;

that is, he provides an imaginative retelling of a Bible story or passage that relates and applies the story or sense of the Scripture to the current concerns of the author and the author's audience. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10 he demonstrates a clear perception of law-observance as the heart of Judaism; and the contrast he draws between Christ and the law shows his disavowal of practicing the law's systemic righteousness that he had once observed with confidence and contentment. These features of Paul's writings locate him within the stream of first-century Pharisaic Judaism. Scholarly discussion of Paul's writings during the past quarter century has focused in a particularly vigorous fashion on Paul's understanding and teaching concerning the law and its pertinence (or lack thereof) for Christianity. That particular issue (Paul and the law) is essentially peripheral to the focused discussion of the contents of 1 Corinthians; yet as will be noted throughout the commentary below, Paul constantly refers to and quotes from the scriptures of Judaism as the authoritative text for comprehending God and the human situation in the context of the Christian church. His use of the so-called Old Testament is complex—it was in some ways typical of Jews of his time, yet it also was quite original in both interpretation and application.

His use of apparently technical language in reference to tradition he had *received* and *delivered* (1 Cor. 15:3) to the churches he founded was taken to indicate his self-understanding and his attitude toward the tradition itself. Moreover, Paul's practice of midrashic exegesis (in which he elaborates on the meaning of a text in a way similar to that done by rabbinic Judaism; see Paul on the exodus in 1 Cor. 10 or on Abraham in Gal. 3) was thought to reveal his approach to the Old Testament, while his concern with the contrast between Christ and the law was determined by his past participation in Pharisaism.

*Hellenism* As it is clear that Paul's past was in Pharisaic Judaism, it is also certain that Paul was a Hellenized Jew. Beyond doubt, those among whom Paul worked and ministered and to whom he preached and wrote his letters were residents of a Hellenized world. Whether one elects to name the temporal age of Paul and his contemporaries as "the era of Hellenism" or "the period of post-Hellenism," the world of that time was thoroughly influenced by Greek culture.

According to The Acts of the Apostles, Paul was born outside Palestine in the Greco-Roman trade city of Tarsus. All of

Paul's writings display the hallmarks of Hellenistic education: mastery of the skills of reading, thinking, argumentation, and expression in writing, as well as others. Paul normally quotes the Greek version of the Jewish scriptures, which indicates that he read the Greek version of the Bible at least some of the time, if not exclusively. Paul is thoroughly familiar with the conventions of popular Hellenistic philosophy and methods of literary interpretation. He engaged in a diatribe style of argumentation typical of Stoic and Cynic teaching. Paul did allegorical exegesis, which was a refined Hellenistic interpretive approach to highly regarded writings, when he dealt with the Jewish scriptures (see Paul on Sarah and Hagar in Gal. 4). He refers to himself with the Greek name, *Paul*, not the Jewish name, *Saul*; and the majority of his metaphors are drawn from the Greco-Roman world of households, sports, street life, and the military. Some scholars have held that casting Paul in the context of Hellenism provides interpreters with the prerequisite clues for understanding such basic Pauline notions as the sacraments and Christology. As this argument goes, since Paul was thoroughly Hellenistic in heritage, he would have interpreted baptism and the Lord's Supper in relation to the practices of Hellenistic mystery religions, and he would have understood Christ in terms of a general, Hellenistic myth of a descending and ascending redeemer figure.

For these reasons, among others that will become apparent in the course of studying 1 Corinthians, scholars of the past two decades have focused with steadily increasing energy on the relationship of Paul's letters to the style and devices of Greco-Roman rhetoric. Understanding the rhetorical features of portions of 1 Corinthians will be helpful in attempting to understand and to interpret its significant elements.

*Apocalyptic Eschatology* In conjunction with Judaism and Hellenism, a distinctive and crucial element of Paul's religious outlook was his apocalyptic-eschatological outlook. Indeed, this worldview (which may be described as being aware of both the earthly reality and the transcendent divine) is a key for comprehending some of Paul's most difficult teachings. Paul's perspective was consistently theological, with a sharply focused christological cast, and it took into consideration the reality of God and creation, the relationship of God and creation, and the place and role of humanity in relation to both God and the created order. This worldview is truly comprehensive, though it is

intimately bound to the language and ideas of the first-century world in which Paul and his contemporaries lived.

It has become increasingly clear through the work of several contemporary scholars (e.g., J. C. Beker, E. Käsemann, and J. L. Martyn) that the apocalyptic-eschatological element provided Paul with a basic framework for his thought and determined his comprehension of the world around him. Paul's language displays his apocalyptic perspective in the way it focuses on wrath, judgment, and the Day of the Lord. His displayed yearning for *the* messianic age is characteristic of all apocalyptic writings. The elements of both Paul's Judaism and Hellenism hang on and relate to this overall apocalyptic structure.

Thus one must ask and answer the question, *What is this apocalyptic-eschatological perspective?* In Greek, *apokalypsis* means "revelation." Paul uses this word to refer to his original encounter with the risen Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:12). That dramatic revelation was the occasion of Paul's call, as well as the time and means of Paul's reception of the gospel that he preached (Gal. 1:11–17). This sort of disruptive intervention of God into someone's life is not unusual in first-century apocalyptic Judaism.

(1) The Jewish elements of Paul's apocalyptic eschatology. In essence, apocalyptic is a special expression of Jewish eschatology that is characterized, as noted, by the dualistic doctrine of two ages. On the one hand there is "the present evil age," and on the other there is "the age to come." The "present evil age" is the world of mundane realities in which human beings live; the "age to come" is the supernatural realm of the power of God. There is no continuity between these ages. Indeed, apocalyptic Jewish thought held that at some future moment "the age to come" would break into the human realm by a supernatural act of God. In this moment of God's intervention, the "present evil age" would pass away and "the age to come" would be established as a new reality, ordained and directed by God. Apocalyptic Judaism held that by this act of God, evil would be annihilated and those who were righteous would be redeemed. Thus "the age to come" was the hope of those who believed in God but found themselves oppressed by the forces of evil in the present world. In Jewish apocalyptic literature the authors usually claim to live in the last days of "the present evil age." Their message to readers is the joint promise and warning that the intervention of God is about to take place.

Throughout his letters Paul's language and patterns of thought reveal elements of this apocalyptic eschatology. For example, Paul frequently uses apocalyptic language: "destined . . . for wrath," "the wrath to come," "the wrath of God," "the day of wrath," "the day of the Lord Jesus Christ," "the day of salvation," "redeemed," "redemption," "this age," "the rulers of this age," "the present evil age," and "the ends of the ages." Moreover, Paul reveals in his letters the conviction that he and his readers are part of the last generation of humanity (1 Thess. 4:13–18, esp. v. 17; 1 Cor. 7:31; 15:51–57).

(2) The Christian elements of Paul's apocalyptic thought. Because Paul does not use the phrase "the age to come," some scholars deny the thoroughly apocalyptic character of his thought. Yet he speaks in distinctively Christian phrases of the same idea when he says, "a new creation" and "the kingdom of God." This difference in phrases indicates a slight but fundamental alteration on the part of Paul. He transforms the pattern of Jewish apocalyptic thought described above into a particularly Christian pattern of apocalyptic thinking that permeates all of his writings. In other words, Paul articulates an apocalyptic perspective that has been modified in light of the Christ-event.

While Jewish apocalyptic eschatology thought in terms of two ages, the present (evil) age and the age to come, these periods were completely distinct, so that one age ended and the other began by an intervening act of God. Thus reality was understood in terms of an absolute temporal (not metaphysical) dualism. As a Christian thinker, Paul has a similar but remarkably distinct view of time. He maintains the temporal dualism characteristic of Jewish apocalyptic, but he modifies the scheme in light of the Christ-event so that there are two distinct ages that are separated and joined by an interim period of time.

For Paul the first temporal epoch is "the present evil age" (Gal. 1:4; 1 Cor. 2:6–8). This age is ruled by the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4), namely Satan, and by the elemental spirits of the universe (Gal. 4:3; 1 Cor. 2:8). Under the influence of its rulers this age is at odds with God (1 Cor. 15:24–28; Rom. 8:37–39). Nevertheless, this age is passing away (1 Cor. 7:31). The second epoch is the "new creation" (Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17). This new age comes as God in Christ defeats the opposing forces (Gal. 6:14; 1 Cor. 7:31; Rom. 5:21), and it is established as the reign of God, an age of glory (1 Thess. 2:10–12; 1 Cor. 15:20–28; 2 Cor. 4:17; Rom. 5:2, 21).

According to Paul, the *present* exists as the juncture or mingling of the two ages (1 Cor. 10:11; 2 Cor. 5:16). Here, 1 Corinthians 10:11 is important. In this verse Paul describes himself and other humans in very striking terms that modern translations often obscure. For example, Paul's words as they were rendered in the RSV read, "upon whom the end of the ages has come." This translation implies that Paul stands at the end of time and looks back at past ages (something like dispensations?)—but, in fact, he does not. The NIV reads "on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come," but Paul's actual phrase literally says, "upon whom the ends of the ages have met"; as the NRSV now translates the words. Paul perceives that he and other humans live at the juncture of the ages. This juncture came about as a result of the cross of Christ (1 Cor. 1:17–18) and it will conclude at the coming of Christ from heaven—which will mark the absolute end of the present evil age (1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:13–18; 1 Cor. 15:23–28). This interim period is the time in which Paul was called and in which he thought, worked, and preached. Much of Paul's message derives from his understanding of this juncture and of the fact that it came about as a result of the cross of Christ (1 Cor. 1:17–18). In essence Paul thought and taught that sin has been defeated (Gal. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:3; Rom. 4:25); that death has been condemned (1 Cor. 15:54–57; Rom. 8:31–39); that the law has been exposed for what it is—powerless (Gal. 2:21; 3:24–25; Rom. 7:7–12); that Christ has discharged humanity from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13–14; Rom. 7:4–6); that although the battle goes on toward God's final victory, creation has been reclaimed by God (1 Cor. 15:20–28; Rom. 8:18–25); that God's sovereignty has been established (Rom. 8:31–39); and that all creation presently awaits the grand judicial inquest (1 Thess. 5:2–11; 1 Cor. 6:2–3; 15:20–28; Rom. 8:18–25); and while the kingdom of God has not yet been fully established in glory, for Christians the present is effectively *already* the messianic age in which, for now, everything is to be viewed from the vantage point of the cross (2 Cor. 5:16). In the commentary that follows, this understanding of Paul's theological vision of reality will constantly underlie and inform the interpretation of Paul's correspondence to the Corinthians.