

Introduction to Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

Character Sketches

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Paul in Corinth (December, 50 AD)

¹ After these things he [Paul] left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them, ³ and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers. ⁴ And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. ⁵ But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. ⁶ But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.' ⁷ Then he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God, whose house was next to the synagogue. ⁸ Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized. ⁹ And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, 'Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent; ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.' ¹¹ And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. (Acts 18:1 – 11)

Paul and Timothy woke at dawn to the sound of roosters crowing. They sat up on their pallets, stretching. In silence, they began their new routine. Timothy drew out some olive oil from a jar and spread it on Paul's back. Paul rolled his shoulders slowly as Timothy pressed down on the hardened knots of scar tissue. Paul, an older man now in his late forties, grimaced in pain, but did his part to strengthen his damaged back and shoulder muscles. Timothy, a younger man half Paul's age, alternated between pressing into Paul's back with the knuckles of his clenched fists, grabbing larger scar tissue between his thumb and forefinger, and sometimes kneading particularly dense areas with his elbows. By the time they finished, both men were perspiring. But their morning physical exercises had only just begun. At this point in his life, Paul had endured two of the five floggings – the forty lashes minus one – he would receive in his lifetime (2 Cor. 11:24). The floggings expressed official synagogue rejection: one at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:50) a few years ago and the other, just a few months ago in Philippi (Acts 16:22). Luke, the Greek physician and teacher, after inspecting Paul's back, had recommended this physical regimen. With a bit of a grin, but with deep care for Paul, Luke had turned a phrase that Paul liked to use on its head, shifting the emphasis: 'You're right, Paul. Godliness has value for all things, but physical discipline has some value as well. You can better endure the rigors of travel, run away quickly from angry mobs, and recover from those floggings.' Paul felt great thankfulness for this thoughtful physician as they left him behind in Philippi for a season to lead the new Jesus movement there. Paul smiled as he rotated his shoulder. He was glad to be alive and with friends who shared his grim sense of humor.

Paul caught his breath as he remembered seeing the well-thrown stone a split second before it hit him square in the face, permanently damaging his eye. Just a few years ago, back in the city of Lystra in the foothills of the Taurus Mountains, in the Roman province of Asia, Paul and his companion Barnabas had seen Jews and Gentiles give their allegiance to the resurrected Lord Jesus. But a crowd of angry Jews from the neighboring cities had caught up with them and stirred up resentment against them. Suddenly the tide turned. Paul found himself dragged to the city gate and pelted with stones, the sign of Jewish rejection. He tried to cover his face with his arms as the stones struck his head, shoulders, back, stomach, groin, and legs. He had been left for dead (Acts 14:19). Paul sighed as he stood to his feet. His joints would never recover from that. And wish as they might, his friends the Galatians could not give him their own eyes to replace his damaged one (Gal. 4:15). He could have announced his Roman citizenship (*civis Romanus sum*) as protection, but what would have befallen Barnabas, who was not a Roman citizen? 'No,' thought Paul, reminding himself. 'I would not let my friend suffer alone for our Lord.'

After their physical exercises, Paul drilled his twenty-two year old protégé Timothy in the Hebrew text of the sacred Scriptures. Paul acted as the synagogue *hazzan* and listened as Timothy repeated phrases after him, perfecting his

vowel sounds, accents, and rhythm. Paul's former teacher, rabbi Gamaliel, grandson of rabbi Hillel, had taught Paul that way in Jerusalem. By the age of thirteen, Paul had memorized the teaching of Moses (*torah*), some of the prophets (*nevi'im*), and the songs of hope called the Psalms. Later he learned the rest of 'the Writings' (*ketuvim*). Timothy's upbringing in the faith was not quite as developed, but the younger man's mind was sharp. These mental exercises kept their spirits and minds prepared. Then, Paul asked Timothy to repeat the same section in Greek, reciting from the Septuagint translation. They then discussed Jesus' use of those passages as recorded by the apostle Matthew and recalled by the other apostles. Meanwhile they heard Silas getting up in the room next door and having his own back inspected by their host, Aquila. Aquila and his wife Priscilla were Jewish believers in Jesus who had left Rome after Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from the city last year. Silas had been with Paul in Philippi. The four men and Priscilla gathered together. After singing a psalm together, they listened for any guidance from the Lord Jesus. They prayed standing up and out loud in typical Jewish fashion, recalling in particular the Thessalonians, as Timothy and Silas had just come from Thessalonica yesterday and shared in some detail how the new believers there were doing. Paul mulled over in his mind what to write them, listening once again for guidance from his Master.

Paul and Timothy washed from the bowls of water and towels that Priscilla kindly brought to their room. Now that Timothy and Silas had rejoined him, and with the equally accomplished teachers Priscilla and Aquila – leaders in the scattered Roman church – together with them in Corinth, Paul felt reinvigorated. What would the Lord Jesus bring about in these communities that were now worshiping him, proclaiming him, and growing? Philippi had been a Roman colony, but without a Jewish synagogue, so progress in establishing the Jesus movement would necessarily be slower there. Athens, of course, had been an important place to visit, for it had the most famous schools in Greece. But now, they were in Roman Corinth, the most powerful, prosperous, and perhaps sexualized city in all Greece, capital of the province of Achaia, on one of the crossroads of the Mediterranean world. The city was diverse, and establishing a strong Jesus-worshiping community could touch many different ethnic groups.

Perhaps most importantly, Corinth had a strong and sizable Jewish synagogue as well. Paul was excited to continue taking his place in the synagogue as a visiting rabbi. He was deeply and urgently concerned about the unrest he saw and heard about in the Jewish communities everywhere. Many Jews were drawing from the military interpretation of the Scriptures, and were agitating for a confrontation with Rome. Jesus had warned of that posture, and Paul knew it firsthand, having been one of those zealots himself. But there was more in Paul's motivation. Paul had a strategy to confront the Greek and Roman cultures with the message of Jesus. Drawing on Moses and Isaiah especially, he saw the value of a strong base of Jewish believers who knew the story of Israel before Jesus: The one true God is the good and wise Creator, not whimsical like the Greek and Roman gods, and who loves human beings and made them in His image; Adam and Eve corrupted human nature and passed on a tainted inheritance, so the explanation for human evil and injustice is internal to humanity; God attempted to create a new kind of humanity through Israel, unique among all the peoples in the world; but that led to God personally coming Himself as Israel's *messiah*, Jesus, and curing human nature of the corruption of sin within Himself, the one true human being. That was earth-shattering news that filled to the full all of Israel's stories and prophetic hopes of having God dwell with them. And now the proclamation rang out: 'Jesus is Lord.' This, in a world which for decades had said, 'Caesar is Lord.'

Now this Jesus had commissioned Paul and others to spread across the whole world to announce that he is the world's true king, dwelling by his Spirit in everyone who believes and welcomes his reign in them. Paul fully expected to find ways that different people and cultures, since they were made in the image of God, still maintained some awareness of this very good God. Yet how different the world will one day be, Paul imagined, when as Isaiah foresaw,

*The earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.
Then in that day, the nations will resort to the root of Jesse! (Isaiah 11:9 – 10)*

Yet despite all of his convictions, Paul was fearful as well. Taking a deep breath, Paul wondered, 'Will the hostility begin here, too?' His body could not handle many more floggings and beatings, and the movement he was part of still felt fragile. 'Will the word of God draw enough Jews and God-fearing Gentiles before then?' He considered his companions in this mission. Then he looked soberly out the window at the temple to Augustus. His heart was burning. For in his weakness, Paul's confrontation with the mighty world of Greek philosophers and Roman Caesars was just beginning.

Gallio (September, 52 AD)

¹² But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, ¹³ saying, ‘This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.’ ¹⁴ But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, ‘If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; ¹⁵ but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters.’ ¹⁶ And he drove them away from the judgment seat. ¹⁷ And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and began beating him in front of the judgment seat. But Gallio was not concerned about any of these things. (Acts 18:12 – 17)

Early in the morning, before Apollo’s chariot brought the sun and the heat to its zenith, Gallio walked down to the seaport for what he hoped would be the last time. He had been the proconsul of Achaia, governing from Roman Corinth for almost two years. He was glad to be leaving the burdens of governance as he thought about rejoining his younger brother Seneca in the great city of Rome. Seneca was a Stoic philosopher and tutor to Nero himself, Claudius’ heir to succeed him as Emperor. But Gallio had done remarkably well for himself, too. The two brothers were sons of the orator Seneca the Elder. Originally from the region of Roman Hispania (Spain), born in Corduba (Cordova), Gallio, whose full name was Lucius Junius Gallio Annaeanus, had used his charm, speaking abilities, and political savvy to win favors with other powerful allies. But he worried for the Empire. He had seen firsthand that the Greek peoples could mix and thrive under the Romans. But he had also seen that the Jewish people did not. The difference troubled him.

Greek Corinth had flourished during the Golden Age of Athens. But as leader of the Second Achaean League, it had been destroyed by the Roman consul Lucius Mummius (in 146 BC), after the League resisted Roman influence. Julius Caesar (in 44 BC) rebuilt the city as a Roman colony shortly before he was assassinated. Gallio could see the ruins of the old Greek city, with its Corinthian style of architecture. But new Roman construction dotted the city landscape. He could hear the hustle and bustle of stone masonry from far away. Rome had been remaking Corinth as a Roman colony, and brought in a lot of business. Rome rebuilt and enlarged the temples, showing that the Greek gods could be incorporated under new Roman names and identities. Roman engineers built a new amphitheater that could seat 14,000 people. The public baths and the *cauponas* (restaurants) and *tabernas* (taverns) were excellent.

Roman Corinth made Gallio proud of his Roman heritage and of Roman political savvy. Rome encouraged a large number of Roman freedmen and ex-soldiers to move from Rome to Corinth, which relieved Rome of a potential source of political unrest. This was common policy for Roman colonies. ‘Very shrewd,’ thought Gallio. That also meant that Corinth had no established noble families who controlled large areas of land, as his family had in Roman Hispania. Hence Gallio had a kind of distaste for the city’s trade-oriented people as well, especially the very rich, who he felt to be constantly grasping for money. So he was glad to be leaving.

The mixing of gods was a good sign of Greek-Roman co-existence. Gallio paused for a moment along the road to look back at the great rock outcropping overlooking the city, the Acrocorinth. He recalled his visits to the temple of Aphrodite, goddess of love, on its heights. Gallio wondered if the legends were true about the thousand *hetairas* (temple prostitutes) that once served in the temple centuries ago, and the high priestess Lais. ‘What a shame they were scattered,’ thought Gallio with a wry smile. He wasn’t as committed a Stoic like his brother Seneca. Not yet, at least. He also glanced at the temple of Demeter on the slopes of the Acrocorinth, and the other temples in the distance, closer to the agora: temples to Poseidon the god of the sea and thus Corinth’s livelihood, Apollo the god of the sun, Hermes the god of speed and commerce, Asklepios the god of healing, and of course Venus-Fortuna the Roman goddess of love. Recalling the dinners served in the temples, Gallio remembered fondly, ‘Ah, the meats served at the dinners were always sumptuous. And the fiery Greek women playing the flutes were, too.’ A generation ago, the Roman military officer and poet Horace had already said, ‘*non licet omnibus adire Corinthum*,’ (‘Not everyone is able to go to Corinth’) because Corinth was an expensive place to live, and the prostitutes were expensive as well. Gallio, however, could afford it all.

Gallio would also miss the Greek Isthmian games. He enjoyed the shows of strength – chariot races, wrestling, and boxing – as well as the musical and poetic competitions. Thinking of all the bets he had won, Gallio imagined his

betting rivals seeking help in the temple of Nemesis. Nemesis was the Roman goddess of vengeance, sometimes called *Invidia* (jealousy) or *Rivalitas* (rivalry). He quietly whispered a prayer to Tyche, god of fortune, to preserve and advance his good luck. But when he thought of the *pankratos* – that peculiar blend of wrestling and boxing with almost no rules – he frowned with distaste. ‘Too brutal,’ Gallio thought in passing. ‘How does that honor a funeral?’ he mused, thinking of old King Sisyphus, the legendary founder of the games, who started the Isthmian games to honor the funeral of Melicertes. As he walked down the Lechaion Road, Gallio looked at the *cauponas* and *tabernae* that he knew well. They would be filled with travelers coming to see the games. He would miss their drinks and stories. But then again, almost anything he had found here he would be able to find in Rome.

The Greek style of oratory (‘Asiatic’) was too emotional and exaggerated for Gallio’s more Roman (‘Attic’) taste. Gallio thought that this tendency to exaggerate was also reflected in the Greek men growing their beards out, as opposed to the Roman men’s clean shaven faces. To Gallio, this reflected a lack of control, not to mention a distinct disadvantage in battle when your opponent could grab you by the beard. However, most Romans in Corinth had become accustomed to Greek ways of dress, manners, festivals, and speech. Latin was the language of the court, but Greek was the language of the street. ‘Too bad,’ thought Gallio. But otherwise, the convergence of Greek and Roman was mutually beneficial, in Gallio’s estimation.

Gallio saw the sea glittering ahead, and felt pride in the peace Rome had brought from the pirates that once plagued it. ‘Since we defeated Carthage in North Africa and the Greek Achaean League across the Adriatic (both in 146 BC), we can rightly call the wine-dark sea *mare nostrum*, ‘our sea.’ The Roman civil wars were over, too.’ Gallio thought confidently, ‘Augustus ended the civil wars and saved the Republic. The *gospel* (*euangelion*) of Rome – the ‘good news’ of the announcement that another Roman Emperor had ascended the throne and would sustain the *Pax Romana* – continued to ripple outward over the seas to distant lands.’ And that peace made Corinth prosper.

Corinth sat at a strategic location: on the narrow isthmus that joined the Peloponnesus to the main body of Greek land. It had two ports: to the west was the Corinthian Gulf, which opened to the Adriatic Sea and to Italy; to the east, the Saronic Gulf which opened to the Aegean Sea and the Roman province of Asia. As the capital of the Roman province of Achaia, Corinth drew those ambitious for power. It was flourishing, surpassing Athens in business, power, and prestige. Wines, olive oils, cloth, metals – all were being brought here to be sold. Corinth’s famous bronze was being made here and sent far and wide. Corinth’s *agora* (*marketplace*) was larger than any in Rome. ‘This city,’ Gallio thought, ‘is now the newest, most beautiful, and prosperous city in Greece. The slave market in Corinth shows how far Rome extends its might.’ People from every tribe and tongue were sold there. So in its most important colony, Rome built a new temple to Divus Augustus, the Emperor Augustus who had ascended into heaven and become a god, as he had claimed his predecessor Julius Caesar had when the comet appeared in the sky. ‘You don’t need armies,’ Gallio thought, ‘where you have worship.’

‘But I know what I will not miss,’ Gallio murmured to himself: the mix of Jews that mingled with the Romans in Corinth. Gallio frowned even further when he thought of the Jews. Disturbances seemed to abound more and more when it came to those people. Why did this strange people who lived between the Roman and Persian Empires cause so much trouble? He knew of the major uprisings in Judea. Herod ‘the Great’ claimed to be ‘King of the Jews’ because he captured Jerusalem from the Persians for Rome. ‘Now there was a useful man,’ thought Gallio. He rebuilt the Jewish temple, but the Jews barely tolerated him. Gallio mused, ‘Perhaps because he also built temples for other gods, and infamously murdered members of his own family.’ The Jew Hezekiah had risen up at the beginning of Herod’s reign, only to be put down. Then, after Herod’s death, his son Judas the Galilean rose up, claiming to be the Jewish *messiah* (*anointed king*) and saying that he fulfilled some old Jewish prophecy. ‘We had to crucify two thousand men to put down that uprising,’ Gallio recalled as he shook his head. The list in Gallio’s mind stretched on: the revolt under Pontius Pilate sixteen years ago, which had to brutally put down (recorded in Lk.13:1 – 5); the two sons of Judas the Galilean, named Jacob and Simon, who had to be crucified under Tiberius; the riot in Egypt, when the large Jewish community in Alexandria got angry just because Flaccus put statues of Emperor Caligula in Jewish synagogues; and even in Rome, three years ago, Emperor Claudius expelled Jews from the city for some disturbance related to ‘chrestus.’ Many of them came to Corinth! ‘They’re already exempt from serving in the army. What more do they want? Why don’t they fight with us? They could make effective soldiers against the Persians. Why do they refuse to worship any of the gods? Or refuse to bow down to the Emperor? They are dangerous,’ thought Gallio, ‘for their *odio humani generis* (*hatred toward humanity*). Even when not in their homeland, they reject our customs, and those of the Greeks.’

Gallio recalled one incident with Jewish unrest that had happened during his tenure as proconsul of Achaia. There was a well established Jewish synagogue in Corinth, led at that time by a man named Crispus. But a traveling Jew from Judea named Paul had arrived, having come through Philippi and Athens. This Paul had been welcomed in the synagogue for a while, until his bizarre message angered the Jews there. He spoke of a claimant to the Jewish throne named Jesus who had been crucified and resurrected to bring in the reign of Israel's God on earth. 'What nonsense! The great Greek poet Homer said that the clutches of Hades were too strong. Every Greek and Roman person knows that people do not rise from the dead, especially someone who had been utterly humiliated by Roman power and the Roman cross. But Crispus,' Gallio mused as he stroked his chin, 'and his household, and other Jews, had believed this claim. This Paul had persuaded them from their holy texts. Those supposedly contain prophecies about the line of Jewish kings producing such a man... Such nonsense,' Gallio thought again. 'This just fuels the fire of Jewish resistance to bowing down to other gods, especially Roman gods, and Roman authority. How laughable that a small Jewish sect would dare use the word *gospel* to announce their own supposed king. Where is this king Jesus?' Gallio spat in the general direction of Judea.

'In any case,' Gallio reflected, 'this Paul had been in Corinth for about eighteen months, and that was enough time for the remaining Jews to be so upset that they brought their case before me. I thought it a silly matter of their law and the interpretation of their scrolls. When I refused to make a judgment about this, they dragged the new leader of their synagogue, one named Sosthenes, in front of my tribunal and beat the poor man. I suppose it was his idea in the first place to seek Roman judgment? The majority of them probably just wanted to lay hands on this Jew Paul themselves, and throw his body into the sea. Now that I have set a Roman precedent of treating this proclamation of Jesus as *messiah* as a Jewish issue, and not a Roman legal issue, other Roman governors will probably follow suit. But I do worry,' Gallio conceded to himself, 'that Jews everywhere are becoming agitated, violent.' Then, the question that haunted Gallio came unbidden to his mind: 'Did I make the right judgment?' Now nearing the western seaport and the boat waiting to take him to Rome, Gallio looked back at Corinth, a look of deep puzzlement and concern darkening his face. 'Perhaps, Paul, we will meet again one day.'

Chloe (September, 52 AD)

¹¹ For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. (1 Corinthians 1:11, written a few years after Paul's first visit)

From the steps of her house, Chloe watched proconsul Gallio walk down the Lechaion Road early in the morning. Of course she had heard the rumors that he was leaving for Rome to seek his fortunes there. 'So it is true,' Chloe murmured to herself. 'I wonder if the next proconsul will also take the position that we followers of Jesus are still part of the ancient faith of the Jews.' It was one thing to face the hot anger of the Jewish synagogue. It would be another to face the cold opposition of Rome. Then her thoughts turned to her friend Paul, who had also departed Corinth a few days ago, but from the eastern port on the Saronic Gulf. Paul was heading back towards Jerusalem, the city of the Jews. She missed him already. Paul had appointed her a leader in the fledgling Christian community, but Chloe was nervous about many things. 'Lord Jesus,' she prayed, 'Please strengthen our brother Paul for all he has ahead of him. And bring him back to us quickly.'

Chloe drew up her woolen *stola* over her shoulders, and woolen *palla* over her hair, and left her house. She walked south to meet Livia in Corinth's large *agora* (*marketplace*). Livia, a much younger woman who had recently come to Chloe's house for worship and shown interest in 'the way of Jesus,' needed advice. She was standing next to the Sacred Fountain, wearing a long *stola*, the garment of typical upper class Roman wives. Hers was made of cotton, reflecting her husband's wealth, as did her embroidered *palla*. She was accompanied by a few servants from her own household. Other women were also arriving at the fountain to obtain water for the day – the task considered to be a woman's, and an opportunity to talk with other women. Livia stepped forward and clasped Chloe's hand. 'Chloe,' she said in a hushed voice, 'Thank you for meeting with me here. I realize that you haven't known me for that long. But, I...I felt I had to confide in someone and I wanted to share this with you alone. I'm frightened of my husband's son from his earlier marriage. It was the way he looked at me,' she said in a low, calm voice, but her cheeks blushed with embarrassment and her brows furrowed with worry as she explained her situation.

Livia was a young, twenty two year old Greek woman, named after the famous wife of Emperor Augustus, and married to Quintus Marcus Varus, an older Roman veteran soldier and wealthy patrician thirty years her senior.

Rome honored Quintus's service with a home in the new Roman colony. Livia had grown to love her husband despite being so much younger than him, for he was a kind man. But recently, Quintus had fallen ill. His son from a previous marriage, Lucian, had arrived a month ago. Lucian had clear ambitions to preserve his father's wealth as much as he could, and showed a rather unscrupulous side. If Lucian married Livia, who was fifteen years his junior, none of his father's wealth would leave him. Such a thing was dishonorable among both the Greeks and the Romans. But Lucian had become a follower of the philosophy of Epicurus and the poetry of Lucretius. He believed that, in general, pleasure was good and pain was bad. He believed that physical bodies – and what people did with them – did not so much matter. He took that 'wisdom' to an unusual place, though, that most other Epicureans did not.

Roman law protected freeborn, aristocratic Roman women. Such women had considerable legal protections: A woman could divorce her husband and leave the marriage with her dowry, since under Roman law, her family of origin would tie her dowry to her individually, and technically she was still under the protection of her own father. But Livia came from a poor Greek background. She was not a freeborn aristocrat and her Greek parents had died from illness, so she had no dowry and almost no other economic support. Lucian knew that Livia was vulnerable. Chloe and Livia discussed the matter at some length. Chloe included the possibility of Livia coming to her home.

Grateful for Chloe's gesture of kindness, but intrigued by the mention of Chloe's home, Livia shifted the subject. 'How did you become a leader in this community where Jews and Greeks and Romans share life together?' she looked with puzzlement at Chloe. 'They gather in your home, do they not?' 'Most recently,' Chloe began, 'I was a servant in the house of Gaius Titius Justus, also a veteran of the Roman wars, and also a business partner in making Corinthian bronze. Gaius had seen me in the slave market many years ago, where he purchased me there to be his...servant,' she sighed. Livia nodded to show she understood what Chloe was implying. 'Gaius Titius was married and loved his wife as the bearer of his children, but like most Roman men, also had many household slaves. But as I got older and as Gaius got older, he stopped having sexual relations with me. I am now forty five years old, no longer as attractive as I once was, but a bit wiser,' Chloe smiled. 'So the family values me. Gaius is sixty. And more importantly, he became a God-fearer in the Jewish synagogue. Years ago, he became disenchanted with the Roman gods for all their cruelty and arbitrariness. He became curious about the God of the Jews. They worshiped in the synagogue very close to his house, so he did not have to go far to talk to them. Besides, they had purchased some bronze from him before. Even though he was a Roman, the leader of the synagogue, Crispus, befriended him. Crispus explained that they believed in one supreme God who created all things, who is good, who called a people to Himself and delivered them to testify to His ways until He sent a king to renew the world.'

'They have strange ways,' Livia interrupted. 'They cut off part of the skin of the penis of their infant boys. Why?' Chloe answered, 'It represents a cleansing. Their God cleansed the ancestors of these people from long ago, Abraham and Sarah. They received it as a sign that they would honor God and also that they would honor their marriage. So all Jewish families mark their male children and honor their marriages. The Jews are unlike the Romans and the Greeks in that way, too.' Livia tilted her head to the side and said, 'Yes, it is remarkable.' Chloe heard openness in the younger woman's voice. The chaos in her household wearied her.

'It also became a sign of hope that their God would cleanse them in an even deeper way. As Gaius grew in his understanding of this God,' Chloe continued, 'He began to live in ways that pleased him, according to their Scriptures. He became more devoted to his wife. He treated his servants, including me, with new respect. He began to feel uneasy with the way he had acquired me and other slaves from the slave trade. It is not the custom of the Jews to do such things.'

'Did he submit himself to the strange ritual?' the younger woman asked with wide eyes. Chloe laughed softly. 'I suspect that he was going to,' she said. 'But another Jew named Paul came from the homeland of the Jews to bring us another *gospel*.' She used the word she knew Livia would be surprised by, the word about a new reign. 'He said the Christ, the anointed king, of the Jews had come from heaven to reign on earth. But not by leading armies, as we do. He came to share in our diseased humanity to give us his healed humanity, as he reigns from heaven. The strange ritual of circumcision was a sign of something more to come, and the prophets Moses and Jeremiah already understood that. God would circumcise our hearts. He would write his law upon our hearts. Jesus performs that deeper circumcision, in our hearts, they say, to remove something in each of us that should not be there. He cut away the corruption from his own human nature, and now he cuts it away in each of us who believe in him. And so he is our salvation from the corruption of sin in us, and our living Lord and companion.'

‘Forgive me, Chloe,’ Livia interrupted. ‘But the way you speak – you believe this?’ ‘Yes,’ Chloe responded. ‘His coming was foretold in the Scriptures of the Jews. He was witnessed by many, Jews, Greeks, and Romans. Although he was put to death on a Roman cross, God raised him from the dead and this was again witnessed by many.’

‘How do *you* know their Scriptures?’ Livia asked Chloe with a clear mixture of admiration and wonder. Livia had previously watched Chloe repeat from memory large portions of the Jews’ holy Scriptures. She knew that Chloe was considered a leader in this new community of people with strange beliefs. She had never seen a woman in Roman culture – and a dishonored servant woman at that – be so respected by those around her.

‘When I was a child,’ Chloe began, ‘I lived in the land of the Jews. My mother was a Greek woman whose family had lived for generations in the northern region of Judea near a large lake they call Galilee, since the conquests of Alexander the Great of Macedonia. My father was a Roman stationed there. That is what my mother told me. I never knew him. But in that region, I heard them singing their songs, called Psalms. When I came of age, I was taken from my mother by slave traders and brought to Alexandria in Egypt. I was bought by a theater man because I could sing. Even there, I would listen to the Jews. There are many of them in Alexandria, including a teacher named Philo Judaeus. I overheard some of his lectures. But after two years, I persuaded another man to purchase me and bring me to one of the famous seven brothels in Pompeii, north of Rome, to provide... entertainment. That is where I met Gaius Titius Justus. I can’t say his wife was happy at the time, but we were all younger then.’

Livia couldn’t help but lean towards the older woman and squint a bit in disbelief at her story. Chloe stood and spoke with such intelligence and self-assurance. Even the way she dressed reflected that. Female prostitutes and convicted adulteresses wore the Roman *toga*, enforced by law, which was otherwise reserved for Roman men. Prostitutes also wore their hair loose. Yet Chloe wore a simple woolen *stola*, a garment of matronly honor, and kept her hair neatly arranged under her *palla*. If that was her story, then the household of Gaius Titius Justus, especially his wife, would strongly object to Chloe wearing garments that reflected matronly dignity, the garments that Titius’ own wife would surely reserve for herself.

‘When Gaius retired from the army and brought us all to Corinth,’ Chloe continued, ‘we moved into a house which was right next to the Jewish synagogue. One day, I heard them singing the Psalms. I remembered that I had sung them in my youth. Gaius and his wife Andronica asked me about it. That made us all curious to know the meaning of these songs, these strange songs of hope and a loving God.’

*What is man that You take thought of him,
And the son of man that You care for him?
Yet You have made him a little lower than God,
And You crown him with glory and majesty!
You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet (Psalm 8:4 – 6)*

For *God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.* How different that is from the Greek story of Pandora, where the gods made the first woman as a punishment on men! Gaius went to listen to the eloquent Crispus, the leader of the synagogue. Eventually we all became ‘God-fearers,’ as the Jews called us. And then one day, Paul arrived, and told us about Jesus.’

Livia and Chloe talked long into the morning. Chloe told her more details of her own life: learning about the God of the Jews; her own decision to believe in this Jesus and be baptized; the weeping of Andronica when she too believed and released her resentment; the great gift from Andronica of her matronly garments whereby she expressed to Chloe that she was a sister ‘in Christ,’ and not merely a servant; the increase in believers from all backgrounds; the trust that Gaius Titius and Andronica gave to Chloe to manage the second house they owned; the additional believers in Jesus who met in Chloe’s home and looked to her as a spiritual leader. Chloe concluded, ‘And now from heaven, God through Jesus does His healing work in us by his Spirit, because this God has always wanted to vanquish the evil within every person with our willingness. He comes to live in us by his Spirit, that he might live and speak through us, and us through him.’ When they finished, Chloe said a prayer of blessing and asked her Lord Jesus to help Livia. They clasped hands again in parting. Chloe straightened her *palla* and said,

laughing, to Livia, 'I suppose I'm still getting used to this.' Livia returned home and found her husband, Quintus Marcus Varus, feeling much better.

Apollos (September, 52 AD)

¹⁸ Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila... ¹⁹ They came to Ephesus, and he left them there... ²⁴ Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. ²⁵ This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; ²⁶ and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. ²⁷ And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, ²⁸ for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. (Acts 18:18 – 19, 24 – 28)

'How the poets trip over each other in the great Roman parade to praise the politicians passing by!' scoffed the young Jewish man named Apollos. He and his opponent stopped circling each other momentarily. The older man, quite distinguished with his mixed black and silver hair and beard, glared icily at Apollos for interrupting. The crowd in the school of Tyrannus stood in hushed and startled silence. Flavius Alfias Avitus continued, 'My Jewish friend, Virgil was no ordinary poet. He saw the truth. Before the Republic were the Roman kings: Aeneas, son of Venus; his son Iulus, founder of the city Alba Longa, upon which Romulus, son of Mars, built Rome; Numa, the second king of Rome, who gave us our laws. And through the Republic, the king again emerges from the ancient house of Iulia, the king whose reign will cover the world.' He then impressed the crowd by his perfect recitation of a passage from Virgil: '*Here is Caesar and all the seed of Iulus destined to pass under heaven's spacious sphere. And this in truth is he whom you so often hear promised you, Augustus Caesar, son of a god, who will again establish a golden age in Latium amid fields once ruled by Saturn; he will advance his empire beyond the Garamants and Indians to a land which lies beyond our stars, beyond the path of year and sun, where sky-bearing Atlas wheels on his shoulders the blazing star-studded sphere. Against his coming both Caspian realms and the Maeotic land even now shudder at the oracles of their gods, and the mouths of sevenfold Nile quiver in alarm.*' (Virgil, *Aeneid*, 6.780 – 802) Many Roman men murmured their appreciation. 'And is this not coming to pass, my young friend? Even in your small part of the world?' Flavius said mockingly, referring to Egypt, for he knew that Apollos came from Alexandria along the banks of the Nile River. Flavius taunted Apollos, knowing that the present weighed in his favor. 'For Rome's *gospel (euangelion)* ripples over the world. Our friends cheer. Our enemies tremble.'

Apollos felt his anger rise as he glanced out at the diverse group of men gathered in the marble hall. If he was only there to personally vanquish Flavius, he would have used a less measured tone. But he had a much more important purpose. He responded in perfect Latin, 'I am indeed from the mouths of the sevenfold Nile. And if Rome had brought to us the Latin tongue alone, we in Egypt would have rejoiced! For Cicero trained the Latin tongue to speak the wisdom of the Greeks, and your own Julius Caesar said of him, '*It is more important to have greatly extended the frontiers of the Roman spirit than the frontiers of the Roman empire.*'' (later quoted by Pliny, *Natural History*, 7.117). He repeated himself in Greek just in case there were those who only spoke Greek in his audience, and continued in Greek. 'But alas, Rome also brought its soldiers, swords, banners, and eagles to plunder our fields of grain. For *Roma* cannot even feed herself. She relies on Egypt and overtakes my fair home. Like a mindless, mongrel scavenger, she feeds, leaving devastation behind. And does not Rome tremble when Egypt wilts?' Apollos saw both angry and approving looks. He was referring to the shortage of grain happening at that very moment, which everyone felt. Another famine had occurred only a few years ago under the reign of Claudius. He knew he was touching an anxious nerve.

'And if Rome merely produced great men, who would find fault?' Apollos continued. 'But alas again, Rome slays not only our beautiful women,' referring of course to Egypt's controversial and scandalous Cleopatra, which brought forth the intended laughter, 'but their own men of noble mind as well. Where, for instance, is mighty Cicero, that great extender of the Roman spirit? Lying in pieces, his now stilled tongue stuck through with Fulvia's hairpin!' Everyone knew of the beheading of the greatest Roman orator, Marcus Tullius Cicero, because of his outspoken

defense of the Senate and his opposition to Caesar and Antony and their consolidation of power. Cicero, as a defender of the Republic, opposed the view of his younger contemporary, the poet Virgil. Antony's wife Fulvia took his head and repeatedly pierced his tongue in final, cruel revenge. So the example served his argument. But Apollos wanted to help his audience hear his debate with Flavius Alfius Avitus as far more than a debate between Rome and her province Egypt, or between the Republic and the Caesars.

'But there was another great man who was pierced through by Roman justice, so-called, for in truth unjustly. For you know, my friend Flavius, that I come from another venerable people. From Judea, land of the Jews, come I and my family. And to that place I and my family made our pilgrimages to worship. And through our most ancient stories, we are taught not of Zeus and Artemis, but of the one and only true God, maker of heaven and earth. We are taught that we are not pawns of the gods, but that we once dwelled with this good God in a beautiful garden at the source of the great rivers, so that humankind could spread along these living pathways, to cover the world with gardens in true peace. And my people Israel, replanted as it were by this God in a garden land to be a light to all nations, sinned of our own accord, and came under the dominion of others. Our prophet Daniel saw the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans as cruel and twisted beasts, for these empires are unnatural and a violation of the original vision of the Creator God. Yet we cling to our sacred Scriptures, in which are written the oracles of the one God. Just as the one God once placed man above the beasts, so He will raise up a Son of Man and place him above the beastly kingdoms. So it is not from the house of Iulia, but from the house of King David in Israel, that the Son of Man will come forth. And it is not from Rome but from Zion, and not by Caesar but by our *meshiach*,' Apollos used the Aramaic word there, to drive home his point that the Jewish people, not the Romans, were at the center of the world's story, 'God's *christos* (*anointed one*), that the world will be renewed. As our own poets and prophets have said,

*Now it will come about that in the last days
The mountain of the house of the LORD
Will be established as the chief of the mountains,
And will be raised above the hills;
And all the nations will stream to it.
And many peoples will come and say,
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
That He may teach us concerning His ways
And that we may walk in His paths.'
For the law will go forth from Zion
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
And He will judge between the nations,
And will render decisions for many peoples;
And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
And never again will they learn war.
Each of them will sit under his vine
And under his fig tree,
With no one to make them afraid,
For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken. (Isaiah 2:1 – 4; Micah 4:1 – 5)*

Some in attendance that day would say that Apollos' words lingered in that marble hall long afterwards in echoes, as if speared there by some sharp diamond point. 'I tell you, Flavius, and all of you here,' Apollos motioned towards his entire audience as his voice rang out. 'That this word is being fulfilled in your hearing. Jesus of Nazareth was a prophet mighty in word and deed. My father met him, and I sat on his knee when I was a young boy. This Jesus was heir of David and heir to the throne of Israel. A mere twenty years ago, Jesus came to be king yet was rejected by the Jewish leaders in their jealousy. He was innocent and yet was betrayed by Roman 'justice' under Pontius Pilate in his cowardice. So Pilate crucified Jesus, for no fault of Jesus' own. And in so doing, Jesus pierced through the Roman claim to peace and justice, did he not? Not that the veil was thick, for how many other innocent men has Rome slain? And on how many other countries does Rome feed? Yet this time, Rome put to death the author of all life, only to fulfill our prophecies. But the one God raised *this Jesus* from the dead into the life of the age to come. *This Jesus* appeared to many witnesses among my brethren. And the one God has seated *this Jesus* as Son of Man at

His right hand to reign from heaven and be the source of our salvation – salvation from the sin in us, the death we suffer, and the demons you worship. His law indeed goes forth, now, and his word rings out, now, in your hearing. For I bring you this *gospel*. There is another king: Jesus!’

The crowd in the marble hall fell into a great commotion. As Flavius and Apollos continued to debate, some waved their hands in scorn and left, mumbling something about Jewish myths. Others talked among themselves, motioning towards the Jewish synagogue. Still others stayed and listened. Some expressed interest in talking further with Apollos at another time. Among those who stayed were a middle aged man and woman. They were dressed simply. Apollos noticed them lingering, which they did until no one else was left. Apollos was exhausted, and by that time quite hoarse. He looked expectantly at them, not sure whether to be wary or appreciative. The older man came forward smiling enormously, his hand extended in greeting. He took Apollos’ hand in his own. ‘Well done, young man,’ he said with eyes gleaming, ‘well done.’ The woman was fighting back tears in hers. She bowed slightly in greeting. ‘Shalom,’ she said, giving the customary Jewish greeting. ‘My name is Priscilla. This is my husband, Aquila.’

The Ongoing Story

After leaving Corinth with Priscilla and Aquila, Paul and his companions went to Ephesus. Paul preached in a synagogue on only one occasion and then left Priscilla and Aquila there to plant the church (Acts 18:19 – 21), which suggests that Paul was in Ephesus for about one week. Paul then went to Caesarea and back to Antioch (Acts 18:22), which seemed to be his home. Thus ended his second missionary journey. He ‘spent some time there’ (Acts 18:23). His third missionary journey began when he left Antioch and ‘passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples’ (Acts 18:23), again for an unspecified amount of time. After Apollos came to Ephesus, met Priscilla and Aquila, and then went to Corinth (Acts 18:24 – 19:1), Paul arrived in Ephesus for the second time. This time, he spent a total of three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31). Sometime during that three year period, Apollos rejoined Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila in Ephesus after his visit to Corinth (1 Cor.16:12). All this means that Paul must have written his first letter to the Corinthians sometime between 53 – 57 AD from Ephesus (1 Cor.16:8, 19) after receiving a letter from the Corinthians (1 Cor.7:1), perhaps hearing directly from Apollos, and ‘Chloe’s people,’ about how the Corinthians were doing.

Paul was with a man named Sosthenes (1 Cor.1:1), who accompanied him and assisted him in writing the letter, who was on a first name basis with the Corinthian Christians, so they must have known him well. Interestingly, the man who replaced Crispus as leader of the Corinthian synagogue was also named Sosthenes (Acts 18:17). Sadly, that Sosthenes was beaten by his fellow Jews before the *bema*, the judgment seat, of Gallio in the agora. Presumably, the remaining Jews in the synagogue must have felt that Sosthenes was somehow to blame for Gallio’s decision not going their way. Could this be the same man? If so, perhaps he decided to believe in Jesus after the rough treatment he endured. And perhaps he fled the city with Paul, fearing for his own life. He either settled in Ephesus, from which he helped Paul write 1 Corinthians, or became an itinerant missionary much like Paul.

Paul refers to ‘Chloe’s people’ in 1 Corinthians 1:11. Hence, Chloe was either a house church leader or some other kind of fairly prominent woman – perhaps a business woman with contacts in Ephesus who could send word to Paul. I imagine that the case of incest which Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 5:1 – 13 involves the fictional Livia and her stepson. When Livia’s husband Quintus Marcus Varus eventually became ill again, and died, his ambitious and greedy son Lucian, who pretended to worship Jesus in the manner of Livia and Quintus, showed his true colors. He took Livia in marriage to acquire his father’s fortune, preventing her from marrying again. I find it significant that Paul does not fault the stepmother in his letter, but only the stepson and the community. This suggests that the stepmother was either not a believer, or that she had no meaningful agency of her own in the matter. Lucian’s philosophical defense – very likely an Epicurean one – was demolished by Paul, who shook the Christian community out of its paralysis so that they could excommunicate the stepson.

Paul might have met Gallio again, along with his illustrious brother Seneca. Gallio went to Rome in 52 or 53 AD, was reunited with his brother Seneca, and advanced to the position of suffect consul under Nero when Nero came to the throne in 54 AD. Paul arrived in Rome under house arrest, awaiting trial, after he was transferred from Judea to Rome. He spent two years, from 61 – 63 AD in chains under house arrest. During that time, he composed Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Since Paul could receive visitors, and since he evangelized the

Roman guard and Caesar's own household (Phil.4:22), it is entirely plausible that he invited leading public figures and intellectuals to discuss these matters with him. After his two years of house arrest, Paul was freed and by all accounts resumed his missionary activity.

Paul might have met Gallio and Seneca again in 66 AD in Rome, albeit under sorry circumstances for all of them. This time, Paul was imprisoned by Nero (2 Tim.1:8), according to tradition, in the dark pit called the Mamertine Dungeon, from which he must have shouted upwards to Luke to compose his second letter to Timothy (2 Tim.4:11). Meanwhile, Seneca had retired from being Nero's tutor in 62 AD, because Nero had been becoming increasingly violent and mad. Seneca, ever the Stoic philosopher, turned his attention to scholarly pursuits, perhaps awaiting the inevitable. Nero wound up accusing Seneca and Gallio of treason. They both committed suicide in 66 AD. Paul was executed by Nero probably in 67 AD, which means he was alive just long enough to hear of massive unrest between the Jews and Romans erupting in his homeland.

The First Jewish War (66 – 73 AD) commenced as nationalist Jews tried to liberate Jerusalem and restore Judea as an independent Jewish state, free from Roman control. They were inspired by the militant interpretation of their Scriptures, especially the timing given by the prophet Daniel. However, the Roman general Titus, who later became Emperor, crushed Jerusalem and leveled it to the ground. The Second Temple was destroyed. Outside Judea, the Kitos War, or Rebellion of the Exile (115 – 117 AD), showed the long-simmering agitation of the Jews against Roman rule. Jews in Cyrene, Cyprus, Mesopotamia, and Egypt led major uprisings. The widespread killing of Roman citizens by these Jewish rebels was put down by the Roman legions, led by Roman general Lusius Quietus. The term 'Kitos' is a corruption of the name 'Quietus.' Finally, the Bar-Kochba Revolt (132 – 135 AD) led by Simon Bar Kochba, resulted in initial success, an independent mini-state, and the announcement of the redemption of Israel. Rabbi Akiva endorsed Simon as *messiah*, giving him the title 'son of the star' (bar-kochba) from the messianic prophecy of Numbers 24:17, 'a star shall come forth from Jacob, a scepter shall rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab, and tear down all the sons of Sheth...' But Emperor Hadrian summoned massive numbers of troops to Judea and finally crushed the revolt at the mountain fortress of Masada. Hadrian then attempted to destroy the practice of Judaism as a whole, but rabbinic Judaism had already become flexible enough to survive outside the land, without the Temple, and centered on synagogues.

Meanwhile, the strange sect of Judaism that proclaimed and worshiped Jesus as *messiah* flourished, spreading not only in the Mediterranean region, but eastward into Asia and southward into Africa. It had an enormous impact over the centuries. Secular sociologist Lewis Mumford, who had no interest in flattering Christian faith, begrudgingly admits that the Christian influence in the Greco-Roman world was profound. 'What was involved in a realization of the Christian city? Nothing less, I submit, than a thoroughgoing rejection of the original basis on which the city had been founded: the renunciation of the long-maintained monopoly of power and knowledge; the reorganization of laws and property rights in the interest of justice, free from coercion, the abolition of slavery and of compulsory labor for the benefit of a ruling minority, and the elimination of gross economic inequalities between class and class. On those terms, the citizens might find on earth at least a measure of that charity and justice that were promised to them, on their repentance, in heaven. In the Christian city, one would suppose, citizens would have the opportunity to live together in brotherhood and mutual assistance, without quailing before arbitrary power, or constantly anticipating external violence and sudden death. The rejection of the old order imposed originally by the citadel was the minimal basis of Christian peace and order.'¹

The spread of faith in Jesus was full of hiccups and misunderstandings, but nevertheless one rabbi could recently say on a website called *Ask the Rabbi*,

'Dear Karen,

Jewish ideas such as "brotherhood of humanity," "love your neighbor," and "age of peace" are taken for granted today by much of mankind. But when Judaism first introduced these ideas to the world, they were revolutionary. These Jewish concepts have been spread largely by Christianity (and by Islam). Christianity came to a world in which people were slaughtering to Zeus, Apollo, and a host of other idols, and taught some basic ideas of Judaism, albeit in a distorted form.'²

¹ Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1961), p.317

² Ask the Rabbi, March 25, 2000; issue #272; <http://ohr.edu/ask/ask272.htm>, last accessed August 28, 2014

Elsewhere we can discuss in what sense Christian faith is a ‘distorted form’ of Judaic faith. For now, suffice to say that Paul’s vision – really Jesus’ vision – had become a reality, at least in part. People were starting to worship Jesus together, and struggling to demonstrate the reign of Jesus in their lives by the power of his Spirit. That story is still being written.

Works Consulted

Kenneth E. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011)

Bailey's life work as a missionary and scholar to the Middle East, working carefully with original research in cultural anthropology, and Arabic and Syriac Christian texts long forgotten in the West, is unparalleled. He discerned chiasmic literary structures throughout the Old and New Testaments, not least 1 Corinthians. When Bailey turns his highly trained ear and eye to this letter, he hears Paul in the great 'hymn of the cross' (1 Cor.1:17 – 2:2) drawing on Isaiah 50:5 – 11 to craft a traditional Greek funeral oration to flip on its head Pericles' famous funeral oration of the Athenians who had died to save Athens. That is just one example. He hears echoes of the prophet Amos in Paul's finely tuned message, which is a tantalizing and very relevant thesis that I developed further.

Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988)

This is one of the greatest works on late antiquity, by one of the greatest historians and biographers of that period, Peter Brown. Kyle Harper, author *From Shame to Sin* (below), says that Brown's work set the groundwork on the topic of sexuality and views of the body.

Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Donald A. Carson, editor, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010)

This is a very thorough commentary, drawing from Gordon Fee's 1987 commentary and Anthony Thiselton's massive commentary from 2000. It is quite helpful on historical and cultural notes, along with inter-biblical links. Their assessment that Deuteronomy is referenced four times strategically in chs.5 – 12 caught my attention, as is their sense that Paul is developing the Corinthians' understanding of being an exodus community, called by Christ to set up their own standards of justice over against pagan ones, at least to some degree (5:1 – 6:8). I disagree with their handling of 14:34 – 36, and find that their treatment of 5:6 – 8 is lacking because they do not perceive the atonement-as-cleansing motifs from the Pentateuch or in the Gospels. However, I deeply appreciate their work, which makes Paul's letter come alive.

Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, also edited by Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987)

Fee's commentary incorporates the best of contextual exegesis. He introduces each major section with an attempt to reconstruct the historical background. For example, his comment on the city on p.2 – 3 is very illuminating for the tensions between rich and poor: 'Since Corinth lacked a landed aristocracy, an aristocracy of money soon developed, along with a fiercely independent spirit. But not all would strike it rich, since artisans and slaves made up the bulk of the population... The Asclepius room in the present museum in Corinth provides mute evidence of this facet of city life; here on one wall are a large number of clay votives of human genitals that had been offered to the god for the healing of that part of the body, apparently ravaged by venereal diseases... All this evidence together suggests that Paul's Corinth was at once the New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas of the ancient world.' Fee also traces the flow of Paul's argument very well, seeing the letter as a situation of conflict between the church and its founder. While I think Fee underestimates the number of Jewish Christians involved in the Corinthian church, and also underestimates the conflict between those Christians of Jewish vs. pagan background, the commentary is excellent.

Richard B. Hays, *1 Corinthians: Interpretation – A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997)

Duke professor Richard Hays is a preacher and New Testament scholar, and because of that, he picks up where Paul is a colorful and effective preacher. Hays makes very helpful suggestions about how to handle 1 Corinthians as a teacher. He is especially sensitive to the way Paul quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures.

He argues very cogently elsewhere (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* and *The Conversion of the Imagination* regarding Paul's use of Scripture in Romans) that Paul was not being arbitrary in his selection of texts when he quoted from them. Rather, as Hays presents, Paul was calling attention to entire swaths of textual material, much like how an html link on the internet links you to not a small quote but a larger reference that must be considered in its entirety.

Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013)

Harper handles the literary legacy of late Greco-Roman antiquity with brilliant dexterity. His description of the early Christian stances on sexuality might have been handled with more sympathy and admiration, as Peter Brown did. Nevertheless, he lets the ancient texts speak for themselves as much as possible, and also organizes them as more or less representative of prevailing cultural norms. An ambitious work. From him I learned that 'a condemned adulteress was forced by law to renounce the *stola*, the garment of feminine modesty, and don the *toga*, the traditional dress of the Roman man...and the Roman prostitute.' (p.41)

Luke, *The Acts of the Apostles* (circa 64 AD), ch.18:1 – 18

Luke records Paul's visit to Corinth, including details of Paul's engagement with Jews in the synagogue under Crispus; the increasingly hostile reaction of Jews in Corinth; Crispus' decision to believe in Jesus along with his household; the decision to believe of the God-fearer Titius Justus whose house was next to the synagogue; the trial of Paul under proconsul Gallio; the judicial decision by Gallio to view this as a Jewish religious matter and not a Roman legal matter; and the frustration of the Jews afterwards resulting in the beating of Sosthenes.

Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modina, editors, *Jesus is Lord, Caesar is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013)

This was a wonderful collection of essays bringing us up to date on what New Testament scholars believe about whether the NT has an anti-imperial message within its pages. In some ways, it is a literature review, and a very helpful and illuminating one at that. Each contributor to the book not only does an even-handed job with the scope s/he was given (on Matthew, or John, etc.) they take a position curbing the enthusiasts. It is well taken, given that the scavenger hunt for anti-imperial clues has been on since the 'post-colonial' paradigm for studying literature, politics, and the social sciences has dominated the field for a few decades. One is likely to find a bit of 'empire' to criticize if you go looking hard enough! This book is a good examination of that. So it is with disappointment that I must disagree with each author and the book as a whole. I do so because their methodology is truncated and incomplete. Each author analyzes the correspondences between images and phrases used by the Roman Empire and also used by the New Testament, like comparing 'Caesar is Lord' with 'Jesus is Lord.' They say that the New Testament's deeper concern is not confrontation with empire per se, but correspondence with the Old Testament. With this I wholeheartedly agree. However, they stop there, and that is where their methodological problem occurs. I push forward with the additional argument that the Old Testament itself was anti-imperial. For instance, God scattered Babel, then designed Israel to be an open community with laws that respected human dignity and relations, and strict limits on its land claims. Israel's Scriptures criticized urbanization, the centralization of power in a kingship, and the Temple cult itself. When the major Gentile empires emerged on the scene, Daniel condemned them as beastly against the visionary backdrop of a new Adam figure who would be enthroned above them. So the correspondence between the New and Old Testaments on this issue is deeper than these New Testament scholars perceive. The New Testament is anti-imperial because the Old Testament is anti-imperial. I have put my position into the mouth of Apollos in my fictionalized account of his time in Ephesus.

Paul, *First Letter to the Corinthians* (between 53 – 57 AD)

One of the seven letters attributed to Paul which even skeptical scholars agree that Paul wrote. After his first visit to Corinth, he passed through Ephesus, leaving Priscilla and Aquila there, and returned to Antioch for 'some time' (Acts 18:20 – 22). Paul eventually returned to Ephesus (Acts 19:1). Paul wrote 1

Corinthians from Ephesus (1 Cor.16:8, 19), where he stayed for a three year period in total (Acts 20:31). Paul mentions baptizing Crispus and Gaius (1:14). Luke mentions Crispus and the ‘God-fearer’ Titius Justus. Since Romans typically had three names, I found John Pollock’s suggestion (p.162) plausible that the individual in question is Gaius Titius Justus. Paul mentions Chloe in what appears to be a house church leader role (1:11), which provided me with a springboard for imagining who she was. Sadly, we have no other data points about her. I drew on historical and cultural data to speculate on the characters involved in the case of incest (5:1 – 13).

John Pollock, *The Apostle: A Life of Paul* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1972)

The first biographical account of Paul that I read, years ago. While some of Pollock’s theological assessments of Paul have been revised by more recent evangelical scholarship, his historical research is still valuable. In particular, I think his timeline of Paul’s activities in Acts and his letters is the most plausible, including the dating of Paul and Peter’s conflict in Antioch (Gal.2) to *before* the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 (p.99 – 105). I also appreciated Pollock’s description of Paul’s training under Gamaliel (p.17 – 19); and Paul’s physical hardships (e.g. the stoning on p.95).

Pope John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body* (weekly addresses from Sep.5, 1979 to Nov.28, 1984)

Historians and theologians increasingly look back on Pope John Paul II and believe that his greatest contribution to the church is not his resistance to Soviet communism but his ‘theology of the body,’ in which he argues that the human being is a sacrament, and that all our relations, especially marriage is sacramental. Dense but rewarding, these addresses on Genesis 1 – 3, the Gospels, and Paul show the former Pope’s concern with this theme, primarily to address marriage and sexuality. I found them here: http://www.catholicprimer.org/papal/theology_of_the_body.pdf. In addition, I find that the ‘theology of the body’ naturally concerns issues of economic and political power and relations, since it is with our bodies that we affect and are affected by those realities. The Pope might have given more attention to this had his addresses included Genesis 4, but we can also read his *Laborem Exercens* and *Centesimus Annus* to find his thoughts there. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, with its emphasis on the resurrection body, both that of Jesus and ours, is the sharpest and clearest New Testament theology of the body.

Sarah Ruden, *Paul Among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in His Own Time* (New York: Image Books, 2010)

Ruden takes us on a delightful tour of Greco-Roman literary sources and cultural touch points against which Paul must be understood. She reads Paul not as a Christian believer but winds up sympathizing with him in various ways. However, her exegetical understanding of Paul is on the weaker side, and she does not perceive Paul’s reliance on the Hebrew Scriptures.

Tacitus, *Annals* (circa 116 AD), book 15, chapter 44

The Latin phrase *odio humani generis* which I put in the mouth of Gallio comes from Tacitus’ description of the Christians in Rome, when he discussed the six day Great Fire of Rome that burned the city in 64 AD. Tacitus used similar language to scorn the Jews, and many Romans shared his opinion. So I considered it reasonable for Gallio to use that phrase: ‘Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind (*odio humani generis*).’ (English translation by A.J. Church and W.J. Brodibb, 1876)

Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, edited by I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000)

Thiselton is acknowledged to be the leading British commentator on 1 Corinthians. This work is fairly advanced, for scholars and not really for preachers. It is massive, almost 1,400 pages. But Thiselton has an impressive command of the literature on all the topics that Paul discusses in this letter. He includes work by very early Christian commentators on 1 Corinthians, so Thiselton helps us understand how opinions about the letter have unfolded over time. He explores each and every theory very thoroughly, and sometimes does not state his own opinion, letting the reader weigh various positions.

N.T. (Tom) Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 1992)

N.T. Wright's first book in the series of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* lays a very clear foundation for understanding the world of Second Temple Judaism. Wright is perhaps the leading historian and theologian in the field of New Testament. Anyone wanting to understand Jewish movements between Judas Maccabeus in 163 BC and the fall of Masada in 135 AD, and trying to situate Jesus and the early Christian movement in that period, will find this book very helpful. His analysis of the Jewish historian and political traitor Josephus is excellent, especially Josephus' mention of the Jews' military fervor being fanned into flame by an 'ambiguous oracle, likewise found in their sacred scriptures, to the effect that *at that time* one from their own country would become ruler of the world.' See p.312 – 314 for Wright's analysis of Josephus.

N.T. (Tom) Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 2013)

Wright has made an invaluable contribution to the study of Paul. This material, coming in the form of two books as the fourth and fifth books in the *Christian Origins* series, was put together after over thirty years of research and debate with other scholars of Paul. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 in particular are excellent to see Paul's engagement with the Greco-Roman world. Wright makes insightful remarks about Roman poets like Livy, Ovid, and Virgil; paralleling Jewish eschatological hopes, like the Wisdom of Solomon, drawing out the conflict between Jewish thought and literature of this period and the forces surrounding Israel. Wright makes semantic parallels between Stoic philosophers and the apostle Paul in ways that give us a much fuller range of Paul's cultural fluency and rhetorical power.

(N.T.) Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 2003)

This is a very user-friendly commentary, written in a devotional style. It's a good starter for anyone. Wright makes very judicious use of historical background notes, such as the grain famine around 56 AD and its impact on 1 Corinthians 7. His scholarly, theological, and pastoral judgments are very good.

Ben Witherington III, *A Week in the Life of Corinth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012)

This book was a wonderful work of realistic historical fiction steeped in research. Witherington makes the characters of Erastus, Nicanor, Paul, Priscilla, and others come alive. It served as my inspiration for a first-hand, character-based account of life in Roman Corinth. I especially appreciated his treatment of other temples and beliefs, Paul's trial before Gallio and the Roman legal system, and the patron-client relationships that demonstrated how Roman society functioned.