

Introduction to First Corinthians

PAUL AND THE CHURCH OF GOD AT CORINTH

1. Paul comes to Corinth

PAUL TRAVELLED FROM ATHENS TO CORINTH IN A MOOD OF dejection. It had probably been no part of his program when he crossed the sea to Macedonia to turn south into the province of Achaia. But he had been driven from one Macedonian city after another, and it seemed that, for the time being, there was no place for him in that province, despite his previous assurance that God had called him to evangelize it. True, his preaching in Macedonia had not been fruitless: he had left small groups of converts behind him in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. But his mind was full of misgivings about their well-being. No violence had been offered to him in Athens, but the polite amusement which had greeted his witness there was perhaps more difficult to take than violence: violence at least showed that some impact was being made. So far as positive response to his preaching was concerned Athens had been much less encouraging than the cities of Macedonia. So he arrived in Corinth, as he says, "in weakness and in much fear and trembling" (1 Corinthians 2: 3). There was no reason to suppose that Corinth would prove less troublesome than the cities of Macedonia. Any traveler in the Aegean world of those days must have known of Corinth's reputation; this city would provide uncongenial soil indeed for the good seed of the gospel. In any event, Paul spent eighteen months at Corinth - a longer time than he had spent in any city since he parted company with Barnabas in Syrian Antioch - and, by the time he left, there was a large and vigorous, though volatile, church there. Luke tells how, shortly after Paul's arrival in Corinth, he had a vision one night in which the Lord said to him, "Do not be afraid: speak, and do not be silent. I am with you, and no one shall harm you by any attack; I have many people in this city" (Acts 18: 9 f.). Paul was reassured, and the promise was fulfilled: he came to recognize that, while Corinth had not figured on his own program, it had a prominent place in the Lord's program for him. His time in Corinth, and his experiences with the Corinthian church during the years which followed his departure from Corinth, did much to deepen his human sympathy and to promote his spiritual maturity.

2. Corinth

Corinth was an ancient city of Greece; its name, at least, antedates the coming of the Dorian Greeks early in the first millennium B.C.¹ It was situated on the Isthmus of Corinth, where it

¹ The *-nth-* sound-group is generally recognized as a pre-Greek formation. On the history and archaeology of Corinth see J. G. O'Neill, *Ancient Corinth* (Oxford, 1930); O. Broneer, "Corinth: Center of St. Paul's Missionary Work in Greece", *Biblical Archaeologist* 14 (1951), pp. 78-96.

commanded the land-routes between Central Greece and the Peloponnesus and, through its harbors at Lechaemum on the west of the Isthmus and Cenchreae on the east, early became an entry port for Mediterranean trade. It was built on the north side of the Acrocorinthus, which rises 1900 feet (nearly 600 meters) above the plain and served the Corinthians as their citadel. The citadel had an inexhaustible water supply in the upper fountain of Peirene; the lower fountain of the same name served the requirements of the city itself.²

Thanks to its commercial advantages, Corinth enjoyed great prosperity in classical Greek times. It enjoyed a reputation for luxury and its name became proverbial for sexual laxity.³ It was a center of the worship of Aphrodite, whose temple crowned the Acrocorinthus. Her cult-statue was attired in the armor of the war-god Ares, with his helmet for a foot-rest and his shield for a mirror. At the foot of the citadel stood the temple of Melicertes, patron of seafarers; his name is a Hellenized form of Melkart, the principal deity of Tyre. The Isthmian Games, over which Corinth presided, and in which all the Greek city-states participated, were held every two years;⁴ at them the sea-god Poseidon was specially honored. Corinth paid respect, in Paul's words, to "many 'gods' and many 'lords' " (1 Corinthians 8: 5) .

Corinth survived many crises in Greek history, but suffered disaster in 146 B.C. By way of reprisal for the leading part it had played in the revolt of the Achaian League against the overlordship of Rome, a Roman army led by Lucius Mummius razed the city to the ground, sold its population into slavery and confiscated its territory to the Roman state. Little of the Greek city remains visible today; the main exception is the Doric temple of Apollo, dating back to the sixth century B.C.

The site lay derelict for a century; the city was re-founded in 44 B.C. by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony, under the name *Laus Iulia Corinthiensis*. In addition to having its own colonial administration, it was from 27 B.C. onwards the seat of government of the Roman province of Achaia.

Roman Corinth quickly regained the prosperity of its predecessor. At the narrowest part of the Isthmus a sort of railroad of wooden logs, called a *diolkos* by the Greeks, was constructed: on this smaller ships were dragged across the three and a half miles (about six kilometers) between the Corinthian Gulf on the west and the Saronic Gulf on the east. With the old prosperity, the old reputation for sexual laxity returned. The temple of Aphrodite was staffed by a thousand female slaves, who are said to have made the place a tourist attraction and enhanced

² Corinth first appears in Greek literature in Homer (*Iliad* ii. 570, xiii. 664, and under the name Ephyre, vi. 152); the name (though perhaps in reference to another place) has been identified in a Mycenaean text from Pylos.

³ The verb *korinthiasthai*, lit. "to play the Corinthian", was current from the fifth century B.C. in the sense of practicing fornication.

⁴ According to one strand of tradition, the Isthmian Games were founded in honor of Melicertes (Thrasyllus, according to Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* i. 137. 1).

its prosperity.⁵ This background helps to explain the frequency of the admonitions against unchastity in Paul's Corinthian correspondence.

As Corinth was a Roman colony, its citizens were Romans, probably freedmen from Italy, but the population was greatly augmented by Greeks and Levantines, the latter including a considerable Jewish community. The museum on the site of Roman Corinth contains part of a stone lintel inscribed in Greek, "Synagogue of the Hebrews".⁶ While some think that the style of the lettering points to a date rather later than the apostolic age, the synagogue to which it belonged perhaps stood on the site of the synagogue which Paul visited soon after his arrival in Corinth.

3. Priscilla and Aquila

In accordance with his regular practice, Paul maintained himself in Corinth by his own manual labor, and he found employment with a tent-making firm owned by a Jew, originally from Pontus, named Aquila, and his wife Priscilla. The couple had been until recently resident in Rome, which was possibly Priscilla's birthplace,⁷ but had been compelled to leave that city because of Claudius's edict expelling the Jewish colony from Rome.⁸ They appear to have been a well-to-do couple, and their tent-making business may have had branches in several centers, with a manager in charge of the branches in those places where they themselves were not actually resident. They were thus able to move back and forth easily between Rome, Corinth and Ephesus. After their initial meeting in Corinth, Paul had no more loyal friends or helpers than Priscilla and Aquila, "to whom", as he put it some years later, "not only I but also all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks" (Romans 16: 4):⁹ their services to the Christian cause evidently far exceeded their personal services to Paul. They are always mentioned together, and more often than not Priscilla is named before her husband; this may suggest that she was the more impressive personality of the two. In none of Paul's references to them is there any hint that they were converts of his: all the indications are that they were Christians before they met him, and that accordingly they were Christians while they lived in Rome - which may throw light on Suetonius's statement that the Jews were expelled by Claudius because of their constant rioting "at the instigation of Chrestus."¹⁰

4. First Corinthian converts

⁵ Cf. Strabo, *Geography* viii. 6. 20-23; Pausanias, *Description of Greece* ii. I 1-; 2

⁶ Cf. B. Powell, "Greek Inscriptions from Corinth", *American Journal of Archaeology*, series 2, 7 (1903), pp. 60 f., No. 40; A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, E.T. (London,² 1927), p. 16.

⁷ She was probably associated in some way with the *gens Prisca*. While Luke gives her the more familiar name Priscilla, Paul refers to her more formally- as Prisca (e.g. in 1 Corinthians 16: 19).

⁸ See pp. 235, 381.

⁹ See p. 298.

¹⁰ Suetonius, *Life of Claudius* 25. 4.

In Corinth, as in the cities which he had previously visited, Paul attended the Sabbath services in the synagogue for several weeks and made it his first base of operations. A number of Jews and God-fearing Gentiles were persuaded by his preaching; the former included a ruler of the synagogue named Crispus¹¹ and the latter included the owner of a house next door to the synagogue, whom Luke calls Titius Justus.¹² If, as is probable, he is identical with the Corinthian Christian described by Paul as "Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church" (Romans 16:23), then his full name Gaius Titius Justus marks him out as a Roman citizen.¹³ Paul singles out Crispus and Gaius, together with one Stephanas and his family, "the first fruits of Achaia", as the only ones of his Corinthian converts whom he baptized personally.¹⁴ This would confirm that they were his first converts in Corinth. After a few weeks Silas and Timothy joined him, having completed their commissions in Macedonia, and they were able to relieve him of part of his burden, including the baptism of converts. They probably brought Paul a gift from some of his Macedonian friends, which made it possible for him to discontinue tent-making for a time and give himself entirely to preaching and teaching.¹⁵

But the time came in Corinth as elsewhere when the Jewish authorities decided that they had had enough of him, and allowed him the use of the synagogue no longer. Conveniently for Paul, his friend and convert Titius Justus put his house at his disposal so that he might carry on the work which he had started in the nearby synagogue. This house apparently became not only Paul's headquarters but also the first meeting-place of the Corinthian church. Here Paul continued to proclaim salvation through Christ crucified, and the number of his converts grew rapidly; they now included not only Jews and God-fearers but an increasing proportion of pagans.

Among the converts from paganism we should probably include Erastus of Corinth. The name Erastus appears in reference to Paul's circle of friends and helpers once in Acts (19: 22) and twice in the Pauline corpus (Romans 16: 23; 2 Timothy 4: 20), but it is not at all certain that the same man is meant on all three occasions. The Corinthian Erastus, however, is mentioned in Romans 16: 23 alongside Paul's host Gaius (Titius Justus) as sending his greetings to the people addressed, and he is described as "city treasurer" (Greek *oikonomos*, equivalent to Latin *arcarius*). On April 15, 1929, archaeologists based on the American School at Athens uncovered in Old Corinth a slab bearing a Latin inscription which should probably be rendered: "Erastus, in consideration of his aedileship, laid this pavement at his own expense."¹⁶ When the pavement was repaired about A.D. 150, the inscribed slab was removed from its original position. It may have been first laid during the second half of the first century. The possibility - some would say

¹¹ Acts 18: 8; 1 Corinthians 1: 15.

¹² Acts 18: 7.

¹³ 15. Cf. E. J. Goodspeed, "Gaius Titius Justus", *JBL* 69 (1950), pp. 382 f.

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 1: 15 f.; cf. 16: 15.

¹⁵ Acts 18: 5; cf. 2 Corinthians 11: 9.

¹⁶ Reported by T. L. Shear in *AJA*, series 2, 33 (1929), pp. 325 f.

the probability - must be recognized that the Erastus of the inscription is identical with Paul's Corinthian friend; if so, his service as city treasurer (the post which he was occupying at the beginning of A.D. 57) proved so satisfactory that some twenty years later he was promoted to the dignity of aedile (curator of public works) and marked his promotion by donating to the city the pavement of which the inscribed slab formed part.¹⁷

Paul's insistence on "knowing nothing" among the Corinthians "except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2: 2) had some regard to the intellectual climate of the city. As he came to know something of the Corinthians' reverence for current wisdom, he stressed that element in the gospel for which current wisdom could have no place: what more abject spectacle of folly and helplessness could be imagined than a crucified man? A crucified deliverer was to Greeks an absurd contradiction in terms, just as to Jews a crucified Messiah was a piece of scandalous blasphemy. But as Paul persisted in preaching Jesus as the crucified Savior and sin-bearer, the unexpected happened: pagans, as well as Jews and God-fearers, believed the message and found their lives transformed by a new, liberating power, which broke the stranglehold of selfishness and vice and purified them from within. The message of Christ crucified had thus accomplished something which no body of Greek philosophic teaching could have done for them.

5. Gallio's "judgment"

An attempt was made to stir up trouble for Paul at Corinth, similar to the attempts made in Thessalonica and Berea, but less successful in the event.

In July of A.D. 51 (less probably, twelve months later),¹⁸ Lucius Junius Gallio came to Corinth to take up his appointment as proconsul of Achaia. Gallio (originally named Marcus Annaeus Novatus) belonged to a well-known Roman family of Spanish origin: he was a son of Marcus Annaeus Seneca, a distinguished professor of rhetoric, and a younger brother of Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Stoic philosopher and at this time tutor to the future Emperor Nero. His change of family name is due to his having been adopted as heir by his father's friend Lucius Junius Gallio.¹⁹

¹⁷ Cf. H. J. Cadbury, "Erastus of Corinth", JBL 50 (1931), pp. 42-58; P. N. Harrison, "Erastus and his Pavement", in *Paulines and Pastorals* (London, 1964) pp. 100-105. The inscription runs: ERASTVS. PRO. AED. S. P. STRAVIT.

¹⁸ The evidence for the date of Gallio's proconsulship of Achaia is provided by an inscription recording a rescript of Claudius to the people of Delphi (W. Dittenberger, *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum* ii 3, 801; E. M. Smallwood, *Documents illustrating the Principates of Caius, Claudius and Nero* [Cambridge, 1967], p. 105, no 376), which mentions Gallio as holding that office in the period of Claudius's 26th acclamation as emperor - a period known from other inscriptions (*CIL* iii. 476; vi. 1256) to have covered the first seven months of A.D. 52. Proconsuls entered on their tour of duty on July 1. Unless, then, the rescript belongs to the very end of the period in question (in which case Gallio could have entered on his proconsulship on July 1, A.D. 52), Gallio arrived in his province on or about July 1, A.D. 51.

¹⁹ Gallio does not appear to have retained his proconsulship long: soon afterwards we find him going on a cruise to

Not long after Gallio's arrival in Corinth, some members of the local Jewish community charged Paul before him with propagating an illegal religion. It is not said if the charge hinted at political implications in Paul's preaching; perhaps he was simply accused of introducing a cult of which Roman law took no cognizance.²⁰ In any case, Gallio quickly decided that there was nothing in this charge which called for action on his part. The accused man was self-evidently Jewish as his prosecutors were: this was a quarrel over the interpretation of disputed points in Jewish law and theology. Crime and threats to the imperial peace fell within his jurisdiction, but he had no mind to arbitrate in a Jewish religious controversy. Accordingly, without waiting to hear the defense which Paul had prepared, he bade them be gone from his tribunal.²¹ (The stone platform which may well have served as Gallio's tribunal is still to be seen in Old Corinth.) The Corinthian bystanders, pleased at seeing a snub administered to the leaders of the Jewish community, seized the opportunity to assault the ruler of the synagogue, Sosthenes by name, before the tribunal, while Gallio turned a blind eye.²² (If this Sosthenes is the Sosthenes whom Paul associates with himself in the superscription of I Corinthians, then he too, like his former colleague Crispus, became a Christian.)

Gallio's refusal to take up the charge²³ against Paul may have constituted an important negative precedent. Certainly, if he had taken up the charge and found Paul guilty of the alleged offence such an adverse ruling by an influential governor would have been followed as a precedent by magistrates elsewhere in the Roman Empire, and Paul's apostolic work would have been seriously handicapped. Gallio's was no merely local and municipal authority, like that of the Philippian praetors or the Thessalonian politarchs. As it was, his inaction in the matter was tantamount to a ruling that what Paul was preaching was a form of Judaism, an association sanctioned by Roman law. The time was fast approaching, thanks mainly to Paul's own activity as apostle to the Gentiles when it would no longer be possible for any Roman magistrate to regard Christianity as a form of Judaism; but for the present Paul was able to prosecute his ministry in (Corinth and elsewhere without molestation from Caesar's representatives.

throw off a fever (Seneca, *Epistulae morales* 104, 1). Later we find him taking another voyage from Rome to Egypt, after his consulship (55 or 56), because of threatened phthisis (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* xxxi. 33). In A.D. 65, with his brother Mela, he fell victim to Nero's malice soon after the enforced suicide of their brother Seneca (Dio Cassius, *History* Ixii. 25. 3).

²⁰ Cf. S. Applebaum in *The Jewish People in the First Century*, ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern, i (Assen, 1974), p. 460, for Judaism as a "permitted" association. If Paul and his followers could be dissociated from Judaism in the eyes of Roman law, their fellowship and activity would ipso facto become "illicit".

²¹ The *bema* of Acts 18: 12; the word is used of Pilate's tribunal at Jerusalem from which the death sentence was pronounced on Jesus (John 19: 13) and again of the tribunal of Festus at Caesarea (Acts 25: 6), which Paul recognized as "Caesar's tribunal" (Acts 25: 10).

²² This is the point of Acts 18: 17, "Gallio paid no attention to this" (RSV is made explicit in the Western text, "Gallio pretended not to see").

²³ The verb *dvechesthai* in Acts 18: 14 (RSV should have reason to bear with you") has this sense in a judicial context (see W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* [Cambridge, 1957], p. 65).

6. Paul leaves Corinth

In the spring of (probably) A.D. 52 he left Corinth with his friends Priscilla and Aquila, and crossed the Aegean to Ephesus. He visited the synagogue in Ephesus, and the Jews there were so interested in what he had to say that they expressed a desire to hear more, but he excused himself because of a pressing engagement in Jerusalem. According to the Western text of Acts 18: 21, he had to be in Jerusalem for the approaching festival - either Passover or Pentecost. His Jerusalem engagement may have had to do with a Nazirite vow which he had undertaken in Corinth - probably in response to the promise of protection which he had received from the Lord in a night-vision. As he left Corinth, he discharged part of his vow by cutting his hair short before embarking at the harbor of Cencreae,²⁴ but the completion of the vow required a visit to the temple in Jerusalem. He therefore left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus and set sail from there to Caesarea in Palestine. He fulfilled his obligation in Jerusalem and paid his respects to the church; then he went north to Syrian Antioch, renewing acquaintance with his old friends there, before he returned to Ephesus.

7. Apollos and his "school"

Meanwhile another visiting Jew came to the Ephesian synagogue and took an active part in the exposition of the scriptures; like Paul, he too taught that the scriptures had been fulfilled by Jesus. Priscilla and Aquila listened to him with great interest; they approved of all that he said, but became aware of certain deficiencies (as it seemed to them) in his knowledge of the gospel. He had an accurate acquaintance with the story of Jesus, but knew nothing of baptism in Jesus' name: the only baptism known to him was that introduced by John the Baptist (and possibly still administered by some of John's disciples). Accordingly, Priscilla and Aquila invited him to their home in Ephesus, and there they "expounded to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18: 26).

This visitor was Apollos, a Jew of Alexandria in Egypt. Luke applies to him the adjective *logios*, which meant "learned" or "cultured" in classical Greek, but acquired the sense of "eloquent" in Hellenistic and later Greek; the latter sense is probably what Luke intends, but the former need not be excluded. He is also described by Luke as "well versed in the scriptures," which suggests not only a mastery of the text but a facility in exposition. According to the Western text of Acts 18: 25, Apollos (who in this text receives his unabridged name Apollonius) had received his instruction in the way of the Lord in his patris, his home city (Alexandria). This implies that Christianity had reached Alexandria by about A. D. 50, and this is highly probable, no matter what evidence was available to the Western editor when he made this addition.²⁵

²⁴ Acts 18: 18. See p. 348.

²⁵ If it reached Cyrene early (see p. 131), it must have reached Alexandria earlier still.

Whether or not Apollos's expository skill, over and above his ability to find the fulfillment of the scriptures in Jesus, indicates his competence in the allegorical method used by Philo, the great Jewish philosopher of Alexandria (who had died probably a year or two before the appearance of Apollos in our record), we have no means of knowing. It is not at all unlikely, but must not be taken for granted.

How was it, we may ask, that, for all his accurate knowledge of the story of Jesus, he was acquainted with no baptism but John's? To this it can only be said that the gospel had reached him (whether in Alexandria or elsewhere) by a different road from that traced in the main narrative of Acts and presupposed in the letters of Paul - by a road, that is to say, which did not start in Jerusalem. There were groups of believers in Jesus in various parts of Palestine (even in Samaria),²⁶ and some of these may have engaged in missionary activity without having experienced the Pentecostal event which attended the inception of the church of Jerusalem. It is certain that Alexandrian Christianity, whatever the date and circumstances of its inception may have been, was for some generations regarded as defective by the standards of Jerusalem (in the apostolic age) and Rome (in post-apostolic times).²⁷ Further speculation is fruitless, but the more accurate instruction which Apollos received from Priscilla and Aquila would have included something about baptism in the name of Jesus, with its corollary (of which they themselves had learned from Paul) of incorporation by the Spirit into the new community.

Apollos seems to have been one of the traveling Jewish merchants of whom some others receive mention in the Near Eastern history of this period for combining a readiness to give religious instruction with whatever other business took them from place to place.²⁸ When he had completed his business in Ephesus he crossed the Aegean to Corinth, armed with a letter of introduction from his new friends in Ephesus to the "disciples" in Corinth. Luke's statement that it was to the "disciples" in Corinth that this letter was addressed points to the church in Corinth rather than the synagogue: however, Apollos appears to have visited the synagogue on his own initiative and argued, as Paul had done, that the Messiah foretold in the scriptures was to be identified with Jesus though his exegetical method may have been different from Paul's.

At any rate, he proved to be a tower of strength to the Christian cause in Corinth, and many members of the Corinthian church were greatly impressed by his gifts - some going so far as to regard themselves as his disciples. Evidently there was a quality about his ministry that made it more appealing to them than Paul's. Apollos's eloquence may have been contrasted with what Paul acknowledged to be his own "contemptible" delivery (2 Corinthians 10: 10).

²⁶ See Acts 8: 5-25.

²⁷ Cf. W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, E.T. (Philadelphia 1971), pp. 44 ff.; A. A. T. Ehrhardt, *The Framework of the New Testament Stories* (Manchester, 1964), pp. 174 ff.; F. F. Bruce, *The 'Secret' Gospel of Mark* (London 1974), pp. 13 ff.

²⁸ Like Ananias and Eleazar who played leading parts in the conversion to Judaism of King Izates of Adiabene (Josephus, *Ant.* xx. 34-18).

Others, out of a sense of loyalty to Paul, felt that they should emphasize his unique claim, as founder of their church, to be their teacher; so, over against the self-styled school of Apollos there emerged another group whose watchword was " I belong to Paul".²⁹ There does not appear to have been any difference of principle between the Paul party and the Apollos party: when Paul refers to the subject, he simply regards it as deplorable that such party-spirit should exist at all. "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow" (1 Corinthians 3: 5 f.). In his references to Apollos Paul shows no trace of reserve: every mention he makes of him is marked by friendliness and confidence. Apollos's teaching evidently commanded Paul's approval. Towards the end of 1 Corinthians (written from Ephesus in the spring of A.D. 55) he says, among other personal notes: "As for our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brethren, but it was plainly not God's will for him to come now; he will come when he has opportunity" (16: 12). The details of this postponed visit are quite obscure to us, but some recent contact between Paul and Apollos in Ephesus is implied. Perhaps Apollos had left Corinth in embarrassment at being set up as a party leader there in potential rivalry to Paul. Paul was not too happy about some Christian visitors who went to Corinth and tried to amplify the teaching he had given to his converts there, but he plainly had no misgivings about a visit by Apollos.

8. News from "Chloe's people"

Paul first learned about the development of the "school" of Apollos, and the rival "school" which claimed himself as patron, from some Corinthian visitors to Ephesus to whom he refers as "Chloe's people" (1 Corinthians 1: 11) - members of a well-to-do household or house-church, presumably.³⁰ They told him of yet another group which invoked the name of Peter (whom Paul, as usual, calls Cephas). Had Peter paid a visit to Corinth in Paul's absence? This is possible: Peter seems, from about A.D. 50 onwards, to have embarked on a more widespread ministry than hitherto, concentrating probably (in accordance with the Jerusalem leaders' agreement with Paul and Barnabas) on Jewish communities in various centers.³¹ If he visited the synagogue in Corinth, he would no doubt also have greeted the church there, which included converts from Judaism as well as from paganism. Doubt could easily have been cast on Paul's commission by any one who was so minded - he had received it, by his own account, in a vision shared by no one else, whereas Peter's apostolic credentials were unquestionable. If he said something which differed from Paul's teaching, which was more likely to be right? That the Corinthian Christians had a special interest in Peter is indicated by a reference which Paul makes

²⁹ Cf. 1 Corinthians 1: 12; 3: 4.

³⁰ Chloe (of whom nothing is otherwise known) seems to have been head of the household or owner of the house.

³¹ He was en route for Rome to help with the reconstruction of the church there, after receiving news of Claudius's death on October 13, A.D. 54, according to G. Edmundson, *The Church in Rome in the First Century* (London, 1913), pp. 80, 84. Cf T. W. Manson, *Studies in the Gospels and Epistles* (Manchester, 1962), pp. 38-40.

to "the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas"³² -- singling out the last-named specifically (1 Corinthians 9: 5). The point of the reference is that those men, unlike Paul, were accompanied by their wives on their missionary journeys, a fact of which, in Peter's case, the Corinthians may have been aware from experience.³³

If Peter did not visit Corinth in person, then some others may have visited the city and church in his name, and tried to impose his authority to a degree which he himself would not have countenanced. What the Corinthian Christians were pressed to accept on Peter's authority is uncertain, but they may have been urged to observe the food-restrictions in the Jerusalem decree.³⁴ Paul speaks of himself as laying the foundation of Corinthian Christianity and of others coming along and building further courses on it: "let each man take care how he builds upon it", he adds in a note of warning (1 Corinthians 3: 10). As for apostolic credentials, Corinth is one place where Paul has no need to present his: the existence of the Corinthian church is evidence enough of his commission - "the seal of my apostleship in the Lord", he tells them (1 Corinthians 9: 2).

But there were others in the church of Corinth, Paul's visitors told him, who had loftier ideas than those associated with the names of leading servants of the exalted Christ: they claimed the patronage of Christ himself - not in the sense in which all Christians might do so but in a partisan sense. In Paul's eyes this was the most outrageous manifestation of party spirit: "Is Christ divided?" he asks indignantly (1 Corinthians 1: 13). What can be said of those people whose slogan was "I belong to Christ"?

9. "Men of knowledge " at Corinth

The Corinthian church presents us with an example of the subtle changes which the gospel was apt to undergo when it was transplanted to a Gentile environment. Concepts and terms which originally had one meaning tended to take on another meaning from their new surroundings. Paul, for instance, regarded the indwelling Spirit in the followers of Jesus as the first fruits of the heritage of glory which would be theirs in fullness in the resurrection age. For some of his Corinthian converts, on the other hand, the possession of the Spirit, the heavenly essence, was the all-important matter: the crowning achievement of Jesus was his impartation of the Spirit. His crucifixion was significant not so much for the reason given by Paul as for its being the means by which he outwitted and overcame the "principalities and powers" which were hostile to men and would have prevented them from enjoying the heavenly gift. But now that they had received the heavenly gift, they had "arrived"; the coming kingdom of which Paul spoke was already theirs.³⁵ What could the hope of bodily resurrection add in the way of bliss

³² How any one could infer from this wording that "Cephas" was not reckoned among the "apostles" is difficult to comprehend, but see W. Schmithals, *The Office of Apostle in the Early Church*, E.T. (London, 1971), pp. 80--82.

³³ There is an "undesigned coincidence" here with Mark 1: 30 f., where Peter appears as a married man.

³⁴ Cf. C. K. Barrett, "Thing Sacrificed to Idols", *NTS* 11 (1964-65), pp 138-153, especially pp. 149 f.

³⁵ Cf. 1 Corinthians 4: 8.

to those who knew themselves to be here and now "men of the Spirit"?³⁶ If Paul still retained his traditional Jewish belief in a future resurrection of the body, there was no reason why they should take over this belief from him; they were more thoroughly emancipated. Paul did express a clearer insight, they conceded, when he spoke occasionally of believers having died and risen again with Christ in their baptism:³⁷ that was all the resurrection they needed. Let others know the exalted Christ as he was proclaimed to them by Paul or Apollos or Peter: they were in direct touch with him by the Spirit and had no need of human intermediaries. We shall not be far wrong if we identify the men who argued thus with the "Christ party" at Corinth.³⁸

The same attitude manifests itself in the exaggerated estimate placed by some Corinthian Christians on the more spectacular and ecstatic "spiritual gifts" or *charismata*, especially glossolalia. Paul did not rule out glossolalia as a phenomenon inspired by the Spirit, but he was anxious to convince his Corinthian friends that there were other charismata which, while not so impressive as glossolalia, were much more helpful in building up the Christian fellowship. Glossolalia in itself was not peculiar to Christianity: Greece had long experience of the utterances of the Pythian prophetess at Delphi and the enthusiastic invocations of the votaries of Dionysus. Hence Paul insists that it is not the phenomenon of "tongues" or prophesying in itself that gives evidence of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit, but the actual content of the utterances. Taking what may be intended as two extreme examples, he points out that such an utterance as "Jesus is Lord" is self-evidently prompted by the Holy Spirit, whereas such an utterance as "Jesus is anathema" -- perhaps the kind of utterance which he had once tried to force Palestinian believers to take upon their lips³⁹ -- was equally self-evidently prompted by a spirit of a very different order.⁴⁰

It would be anachronistic to call these "men of the Spirit" Gnostics; that is a term best reserved for adherents of the various schools of Gnosticism which flourished in the second century A.D. Their doctrine, however, might permissibly be described as "incipient Gnosticism". From Paul's Corinthian correspondence one can at least appreciate "into how

³⁶ Cf. I Corinthians 15: 12.

³⁷ Cf. Romans 6: 4 f. (where, however, the rising with Christ seems to be future as well as present); Colossians 2: 11-13.

³⁸ Cf. T. W. Manson, *Studies in the Gospels and Epistles*, p. 207. This is a quite different account of the Christ party from that propounded by F. C. Baur in his epoch-making article "Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde. *Tubinger Zeitschrift für Theologie* 5 (1831), Heft 4, pp. 61-206 (reprinted in *Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelausgaben*, ed. K. Scholder, i [Stuttgart, 1963], pp. 1-76). Baur looked on the Christ party (to which he found a further reference in 2 Corinthians 10: 7) as comprising judaistic adherents of Peter who wished to stress their relationship to the Christ who had appointed and commissioned Peter and his colleagues.

³⁹ Acts 26: 11.

⁴⁰ I Corinthians 12: 3. Another, but less probable, explanation is that some Gentile Christians were so exclusively devoted to the heavenly Christ whose presence they enjoyed by the Spirit that they anathematized any reference to the earthly Jesus who suffered humiliation and death.

congenial a soil the seeds of Gnosticism were about to fall".⁴¹ The "men of the Spirit" at Corinth certainly set much store by wisdom (*sophia*) and knowledge (*gnosis*), reckoning these qualities (as Paul tells them) by current secular standards, whereas (he maintained) in the gospel of Christ crucified God had turned these standards upside down and made them look foolish. The knowledge which they cultivated, if it was not accompanied by Christian love, could not build up the Christian community or strengthen its fellowship. It carried with it a temptation to despise fellow-Christians who were thought to be less enlightened and to treat with impatience their immature scruples in such matters as food and sex. They themselves regarded the body as a temporary provision and held that bodily actions were morally and religiously indifferent.

Paul, the most liberal and emancipated of first-century Christians, could go a long way with these "men of knowledge". He agreed with them that the flesh of animals which had been sacrificed to pagan deities was none the worse for that, and that Christians might say grace over it and eat it with a good conscience; but, unlike them, he was always prepared voluntarily to restrict his liberty in such matters if its exercise might harm the conscience of a less emancipated Christian.

On the other hand, while food was ethically and spiritually a matter of indifference, sexual relations were not: they had profound and lasting effects on the personalities of those involved.⁴² The "men of knowledge" had a saying, "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, but God will destroy both one and the other"⁴³ -- and they were inclined to add as a corollary: "Sex for the body and the body for sex". But the corollary was inadmissible, according to Paul: food and stomach would alike perish, it was true, but sexual relationships affected not the body only but the whole person, and the person would not share the fate of the mortal body. Not long after he left Corinth he had occasion to send his converts there a letter, now lost (which may be conveniently referred to as "Corinthians A"), urging them not to tolerate fornication and certain other vices within their fellowship,⁴⁴ but it is plain that they found it difficult to put his advice into practice, for in one subsequent letter after another he had to repeat it, not simply by way of general exhortation but with reference to specific cases. It was clearly no easy matter even for regenerate Christians to break free from the besetting sin of their city, especially when some "enlightened" members of their community kept assuring them that it was not really a sin at all.

How far some of these "enlightened" people were prepared to go appears from an incident which was reported to Paul by one or more of the visitors from Corinth who called on him at Ephesus, and to which he reacted vigorously. A member of the Corinthian church had

⁴¹ R. Law, *The Tests of Life* (Edinburgh, 1909), p. 28.

⁴² Cf. D. S. Bailey, *The Man-Woman Relation in Christian Thought* (London 1959), p. 10.

⁴³ I Corinthians 6: 13. Possibly RSV is right in placing the closing quotation mark after ". . . the stomach for food", in which case "but God will destroy both one and the other" is Paul's comment on their saying.

⁴⁴ It is referred to in I Corinthians 5: 9-11. 48. I Corinthians 5: I ff.

begun to cohabit with his father's wife. Whether the father was alive or dead is not made clear, but even in permissive Corinth such a relationship was generally regarded as going too far, and its existence within the membership of the church must inevitably damage the church's reputation. That was bad enough, but even worse was the fact that many members of the church were disposed to be proud of this situation, looking on it as a rather fine assertion of Christian liberty, setting at naught the inhibitions of Jewish law and pagan convention alike. Such conduct, if tolerated within the church, would corrupt the whole fellowship, said Paul, as surely as a little leaven would leaven the whole batch of dough. The offender must be disowned, excluded from the membership of the church, for the church's health and also for his own ultimate salvation.⁴⁵

10. "Weaker brethren" at Corinth

It was not only against the perversion of Christian liberty into license that Paul had to put the Corinthian church on its guard. Some of its members, perhaps by reaction against the pervasive immorality of Corinthian life, or in anticipation of the ascetic Gnosticism of the second century, thought it wise to abstain from marriage and impose a severe regimen on the body. Others had scruples about eating the flesh of animals which had been sacrificed to idols, to a point where they would make careful inquiries about any meat offered to them in case it had been so used and, in case of doubt, would abstain from meat. Such people would be disposed to listen sympathetically to critics of Paul who disapproved of what they considered to be his regrettable laxity in this and other matters relating to food.

Paul was foremost in restricting his liberty for the sake of Christian charity, and recommended his example in this regard to his converts, he insisted that such restrictions must be voluntarily self-imposed, and saw in any attempt to impose them from without a threat to the grace of the gospel and the freedom of the Spirit. His policy in this regard comes to expression in the replies which he gave to a number of questions from the church of Corinth sent to him during his Ephesian ministry.

⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 5:1 ff.