

Tyndale's Commentary, 1 Corinthians 1 through 4

1. INTRODUCTION (1:1–9)

A. Salutation (1:1–3)

1. Paul's opening is the usual one in a first-century letter: first the name of the writer(s), then that of the addressee(s), and a prayer. But to each part Paul gives a characteristically Christian twist. Thus his name is followed by called to be an apostle, very appropriate in this letter where his apostolic authority is used so freely to put wrong matters right. Called (cf. Rom. 1:1) points to the divine origin of his apostolate (cf. Gal. 1:1), as does the insistence that it is by the will of God (cf. 2 Cor. 1:1). Our brother Sosthenes may be the Jewish 'synagogue ruler' (Acts 18:17), in which case he was subsequently converted. But the name is not uncommon and it may not be the same man.

2. The letter is addressed to the church of God in Corinth, 'a great and joyful paradox' (Bengel). Church (ekklēsia) is a term which in ordinary Greek could apply to any secular assembly (it is used of the rioting Ephesians in Acts 19:32, 41; cf. v. 39). The Christians by-passed the regular words for religious brotherhoods, and made this their usual self-designation. They were probably influenced by the fact that it is used in lxx of the people of Israel. The usage reflects their deep conviction that the church is not merely one religious group among many. It is unique. Ordinary religious words will not do. And it is not any 'assembly': it is the ekklēsia of God. This is further defined as those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy. Holy is from the same root as sanctified, where the basic idea is not that of high moral character as with us, but of being set apart for God (though, of course, the character implied in such separation is not out of mind).

It is possible that together with all those everywhere widens the salutation to include all Christians (Conzelmann sees a reference to 'the idea of the universal church'), and this is the most natural interpretation of the Greek. T. W. Manson takes 'every place' (topos) to mean 'every place of worship', as in some Jewish synagogue inscriptions. But a strong objection to both is that the Epistle gives no sign of being a circular or a general manifesto. It sticks stubbornly to local issues. It is thus better to take the phrase closely with the preceding. The Corinthians are called to be holy, not as an isolated unit, but along with other people. It is unusual to have Christians described as those who call on the name of Christ (though it is readily intelligible). In the Old Testament people call on the name of Yahweh (Joel 2:32, etc.), so that in using the expression Paul is assigning the highest possible place to Christ.

3. Grace is one of the great Christian words. It resembles the usual Greek greeting, but there is a world of difference between 'greeting' (chairein) and 'grace' (charis). Grace speaks of God's free gift to us, and more especially of his free gift in Christ. Peace is the usual Hebrew greeting. But the Hebrew šālôm means more than 'peace' does in English. It means not the absence of strife,

but the presence of positive blessings. It is the prosperity of the whole person, especially his spiritual prosperity.

This is the typical greeting, found in almost every letter in the New Testament (sometimes with ‘mercy’ added). And not only are these two qualities mentioned, but God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are linked as joint-authors. No higher place could be given to Christ.

B. Thanksgiving (1:4–9)

Paul usually has a thanksgiving at the beginning of his letters. In view of his trenchant criticisms of the Corinthians some feel that this particular thanksgiving is ironical. There seems no real basis for this. Paul does not give thanks for qualities in the Corinthians like faith and love (contrast 1 Thess. 1:2–3), but for what God’s grace has in fact done in them. With all its faults, ‘the Christian community at Corinth must have presented as a whole a marvellous contrast to their heathen fellow-citizens’ (Lightfoot on v. 5).

4–5. Merely human achievement means little to Paul; in the flesh ‘nothing good lives’ (Rom. 7:18). He gives thanks, not for what the Corinthians have done of themselves, but for what God’s grace given ... in Christ Jesus has accomplished in them. He singles out two points, speaking, the telling forth of the truth, and knowledge, the grasp of the truth (Robertson points out that it is important to have something worth saying and not mere fluency). ‘He selects the gifts of which the Corinthians were especially proud’ (Parry). He later combines the two in ‘the word of knowledge’ (12:8).

6. Our testimony about Christ points to the derivative nature of the gospel. The gospel is the good news of what God has done; all that the preachers do is pass it on, bear their witness to it. This witness was confirmed in the Corinthians. The verb is often used in the papyri in the legal sense of guaranteeing. Paul is saying that the changed lives of the Corinthians, specifically their ‘speaking’ and their ‘knowledge’ (v. 5), demonstrated the validity of the message preached to them. The effects of the preaching were the guarantee of its truth.

7. The result (Therefore) of all this is that the Corinthians lack no spiritual gift (charisma). This word is used (a) of salvation (Rom. 5:15), (b) of God’s good gifts in general (Rom. 11:29), and (c) of special endowments of the Spirit (12:4ff.). Here the thought is the wider one (b). God has enriched their lives so that they lack no spiritual gift. The reference to the Lord’s second coming is unexpected. But the present foretaste of the Spirit may well turn our thoughts to the fuller experience that awaits us at the last great day (cf. Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:13–14). The word revealed (actually the noun ‘revelation’) points to the fuller knowledge that the coming of the Lord will bring (cf. 2 Thess. 1:7). We shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2). Believers wait, not in apathy, but in positive hope (cf. Conzelmann).

8. The verb keep you strong is that translated ‘was confirmed’ in v. 6. Christ, who has enriched the Corinthians and given them grace and every good gift, is their guarantee that right through

until the last time nothing will be lacking to them. The enriching with the Spirit's gifts is itself an assurance, a foretaste of the good things to come. Just as the end of time may be referred to as the 'revelation' of Christ (v. 7), so it may be spoken of as the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Old Testament looks for the coming of 'the day of the Lord' (Amos 5:18); the New sees this as the day of Christ. Here the thought is that because it is his day and because it is he who will 'guarantee' the Corinthians, they may be assured that they will be blameless in that day. No charge can be laid against those whom Christ guarantees (cf. Rom. 8:33).

9. This is not a vain boast. It is a sure confidence grounded in the fact that God ... is faithful. The Corinthians may confidently look for the continuance of his blessing, for his character is at stake. Paul goes back to beginnings. The faithful God has called the Corinthian Christians into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Paul has said that he is an apostle because of the divine call (v. 1). Now we see that there is a call to every believer. It is because God has called us and not on account of some initiative of our own that we have become Christians. niv takes the genitive after *koinōnia* as subjective, 'fellowship with' (as fellowship with the Spirit, Phil. 2:1). But such a genitive may be objective, 'fellowship in' (as 'fellowship in his sufferings', Phil. 3:10). Here it is possible that Paul means that the fellowship is a common partaking of Christ (cf. *neb*, 'called you to share in the life of his Son'). But the genitive of a person is more likely to be subjective and we should accept fellowship with his Son as the meaning (Ellicott thinks it is both, fellowship 'in Him and with Him'). The word is the direct opposite of 'divisions' in v. 10. It is fellowship with (and in) Christ to which we are called, not divisions from one another.

We should notice the way Paul dwells on the name of his Saviour. Nine times in these nine verses he makes use of this name, and he will do it again in the next verse. Christ is absolutely central. Paul lingers lovingly over the name.

2. DIVISION IN THE CHURCH (1:10–4:21)

A. The fact of division (1:10–17)

1. The parties (1:10–12)

10. The adversative conjunction *de*, 'but' (which niv omits) sets what follows in contrast to the preceding. So far from fellowship being realized there is division. Paul leads into the subject with a tender appeal. He uses the verb *appeal*, and the affectionate address, *brothers*, a word he will use thirty-nine times in this letter, far and away the most frequent use in any of his letters (next are Romans and 1 Thessalonians, each with nineteen). Further, he implores them in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. The full title heightens the solemnity of his appeal and the one name stands over against all party names.

That all of you agree (more literally, 'speak the same thing') makes use of a classical expression for being united. The use of party cries always tends to deepen and perpetuate division and Paul calls for their abandonment. To 'speak the same thing' can be a first step to real unity, whereas

catch cries promote division. Divisions (schismata) are not ‘schisms’, but ‘dissensions’ (‘cliques’, Moffatt). The divisions were internal, and the groups were still one church and, for example, still met for Holy Communion (11:17ff.). Paul looks for them to be perfectly united, where his verb is used of restoring anything to its right condition. It is used of mending nets (Matt. 4:21), and of supplying what is lacking in the faith of the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 3:10). The condition of the Corinthian church was far from what it should have been. Restorative action was demanded. Paul looks to them to come to be perfectly united in mind and thought. The two words do not differ greatly, but mind may mean ‘frame of mind’ and thought ‘opinion’.

11. Chloe is not otherwise known. As Paul mentions her name it is perhaps more likely that she was an Ephesian than a Corinthian, but we do not know. Nor do we know whether she was a Christian, though this may be judged probable. She was evidently well-to-do, with interests in both Ephesus and Corinth, and some of her people had informed Paul of the situation. The verb means ‘made clear’. Paul was not left in any doubt. Possibly also the word ‘implies that the Apostle was reluctant to believe the reports which had come to his ears’ (Edwards). Quarrels are one of the ‘acts of the sinful nature’ (Gal. 5:19–21, there translated ‘discord’). They do not belong among God’s people.

12. Paul’s charge becomes precise. Clearly the trouble was widespread, and cliques had appeared, each attaching itself to a favourite teacher. Many try to outline the teachings of the various factions, but this is all guesswork. We have no information. From the general tone of Paul’s references to Apollos and from what we know of this disciple from other passages it is clear that there was no great difference in their teaching. Paul makes not one criticism of him, and he had urged him to return to Corinth (16:12). The choice would perhaps have been made on the basis of their methods of preaching (see Introduction, p. 25).

The Cephas party (Cephas is the Aramaic form of the name ‘Peter’) raises difficulties of another sort. We do not know whether Peter had ever been in Corinth or not. If he had been, the basis of attachment may have been personal. But there were other considerations. Peter had been a Christian longer than Paul. He had been the leader of the Twelve. He seems to have been more ready to conform to the Jewish Law than was Paul (cf. Gal. 2:11ff.). There may have been some different emphasis in his preaching from that of Paul, though if so it must have been slight. For whatever reason, a section of the Corinthians felt that there was something about Peter that made him the man to appeal to.

Some have thought that there was no Christ party, understanding I follow Christ as Paul’s own interjection. The construction of the sentence makes this most unlikely; the Greek seems to point to a fourth party, as does the question ‘Is Christ divided?’ (v. 13; is 2 Cor. 10:7 relevant?). Whether these people were simply tired of the other three, and so said ‘We belong to Christ, not

any human leader', or whether they had some distinctive teachings we have no way of knowing. Either way they had absorbed the spirit of partisanship. It is this that bothers Paul. He does not attack the teaching of any of the parties, but the fact that there were parties. He does not exempt those who clung to his own name. The whole thing was wrong. He would have none of it.

2. Not due to Paul (1:13–17)

13. The apostle's indignation explodes in a series of questions. Is Christ divided? has been understood as an exasperated exclamation rather than a question (so gnb, neb). Others take the verb as middle (as it is in Luke 12:13), which would give the sense, 'Has Christ shared (you) with others?' and indicate that part only of them had been devoted to Christ. But the passive seems much more likely. This could mean 'Has Christ been apportioned?' (i.e. to one of the conflicting groups; cf. Moffatt, jb, 'Has Christ been parcelled out?'), or, 'Has Christ been divided up?' This last is the most likely meaning, but whichever we adopt Paul is envisaging an utter impossibility. Christ is one, and the church, which is his body, must be one.

Was Paul crucified for you? also points to the unthinkable, and goes to the heart of the Christian way. The Corinthians, with their emphasis on wisdom, seem to have overlooked the truth that Christ's cross is absolutely central. No other than he could accomplish the crucial work of redemption. The third question shows that they had not realized the significance of their baptism (baptism and the cross are connected again in Rom. 6:3ff.). They had been baptized into Christ, not into any man. Their allegiance was to Christ alone.

14–16. Paul had baptized very few of the Corinthian converts, and he regards this as providential. He thanks God for it. Some think that baptism established a 'mystic relationship' (Héring) between baptizer and baptized, but it is not easy to establish this in the New Testament. Christ himself delegated baptism to his followers (John 4:1–2). Peter seems to have done this too (Acts 10:48). Paul had made exceptions in the cases of Crispus ('the synagogue ruler', Acts 18:8), Gaius (his host, Rom. 16:23), and the household of Stephanas (the mention of the latter after a little interval is a natural touch in a dictated letter). It is unlikely that this was done on account of the importance of these people, for 'this idea would contradict the very drift of the whole passage' (Godet). Paul does not disclose his reasons. There may have been a few others (v. 16), but clearly it was well known that it had not been Paul's practice to baptize.

This fact makes it clear that he had made no attempt to bind converts to himself personally (cf. v. 15). The 'name' in antiquity meant far more than it does with us. It stood for the whole personality; it summed up the whole person. The preposition *eis* is literally 'into', and 'Into the name' implies entrance into fellowship and allegiance, such as exists between the Redeemer and the redeemed' (Robertson and Plummer). There could be no suggestion that Paul had said or

done anything to bring his converts into such a relation to him personally. He had pointed people to Christ.

17. The essence of Paul's commission was to preach the gospel, not to perform liturgical functions, even important ones like baptism. Preaching is primary in the original commission Christ gave the Twelve (Mark 3:14) and throughout the New Testament it is this that is primary in the work of the apostles. They had a unique place as the witnesses of God's saving act in Christ. Their main business was to proclaim it.

Some at least of the Corinthians were setting too high a value on human wisdom and human eloquence in line with the typical Greek admiration for rhetoric and philosophical studies. In the face of this Paul insists that preaching with words of human wisdom ('cleverness in speaking', BAGD) was no part of his commission. That kind of preaching would draw people to the preacher. It would nullify the cross of Christ. The faithful preaching of the cross leads people to put their trust, not in any human device, but in what God has done in Christ. A reliance on rhetoric would cause trust in men, the very opposite of what the preaching of the cross is meant to effect.

B. The 'foolishness' of the gospel (1:18–2:5)

1. The Message Was 'Foolish' (1:18–25)

The Corinthians had clearly emphasized the importance of wisdom. In bold and forceful language Paul contrasts the wisdom of God, which seems folly to the sophisticated Corinthians, with the worldly wisdom that they so admired and that was so ineffective. Williams remarks that 'the world has had enough teachers, it needs a Redeemer' and it is something like this that Paul is saying. Notice that he is in opposition to all the groups, not any one of them in particular.

18. The message (neb, 'the doctrine') is literally 'the word'; it contrasts with 'words of human wisdom' in v. 17 (where 'words' is really singular). It includes both the manner and the matter of the apostolic preaching. The message does not please the perishing, any more than the simplicity with which it is presented. In their 'wisdom' they see in it nothing but foolishness ('nonsense', Phillips). A well-known graffito in Rome depicts a worshipper standing before a crucified figure with the body of a man and the head of an ass and the inscription 'Alexamenos worships his god'. That was the way the worldly-wise regarded the message of the cross. There is a contrast between those who are perishing and us who are being saved (cf. Luke 13:23; 2 Cor. 2:15). Ultimately all must fall into one of these two classes; there is no other. Those being saved have not yet all the wisdom of heaven, but their newness of life enables them to weigh spiritual things. They perceive the greatness of the gospel, whereas those who are perishing are blind to it. The opposite of foolishness is 'wisdom' and we expect Paul to speak of the gospel as 'the wisdom of God'. Instead he says it is power (cf. Rom. 1:16). It is not simply good advice, telling us what we should do. Nor is it information about God's power. It is God's power.

19. Paul clinches his argument with a quotation from Isaiah 29:14 (with a slight variation from lxx). Paul is not saying something new. From of old God's way had stood in contrast with that suggested by human wisdom (cf. Ps. 33:10). People always think their way is right (cf. Prov. 14:12; 16:25). But God confutes their 'wisdom'; he reduces their systems to nothing. In this context there is not much difference between wisdom and intelligence. Properly the former denotes mental excellence in general, the latter the intelligent critical understanding of 'the bearings of things' (Lightfoot on Col. 1:9). Neither can stand before God.

20. Paul hammers home the point with a series of rhetorical questions (cf. Job 28:12; Isa. 19:12; 33:18). Some have thought that the wise man means the Greek sophist, the scholar the Jewish scribe, while the philosopher of this age means both. Others reverse the significance of the first and the last. But it is unlikely that Paul had such distinctions in mind. His point is that no human wisdom can avail before God, and he uses three typical terms for the learned and acute of this world. There is a glance at the transitory nature of human wisdom in the use of this age (αιῶν; cf. neb, 'limited, all of them, to this passing age'). This world is but a passing show and its wisdom passes with it. God has not simply disregarded this wisdom or shown it to be foolish; he has made it foolish. Paul leaves not the slightest doubt that God has rejected all that rests on merely human wisdom.

21. It is unlikely that the wisdom of God here refers to the revelation in nature as some hold (cf. Rom. 1:19–20). They think Paul means that when people failed to hear God speaking through the world of nature he spoke to them in another way. But the thrust of the passage is against all such views. Paul is saying that God in his wisdom chose to save people by the way of the cross and by no other way. Pleases fixes attention on God's free and sovereign choice. It was never his plan that people should come to know him by their exercise of wisdom. He was pleased to reveal himself in quite a different way. Paul brings out the total unexpectedness of this way with the bold assertion that it is foolishness. People never have acclaimed the gospel as a masterpiece of wisdom. To the natural man it does not make sense. Paul was not unaware of what he was up against as he preached the gospel. What was preached (the κήρυγμα) is the content of the proclamation. It is not merely the fact that men preach the gospel that is 'foolish'; it is the gospel itself, the message that God saves us through a crucified Saviour. People do not receive salvation by exercising wisdom. Salvation comes to those who believe (the present tense points to a continuing faith).

22. In setting the Jews' demand for miraculous signs over against the Greeks' quest for wisdom Paul brings out the characteristics of two nations. The matter-of-fact Jews showed little interest in speculative thought. Their demand was for evidence and their interest was in the practical. They thought of God as active in performing mighty wonders, and in this vein they had demanded a sign from Jesus (Matt. 12:38; 16:1, 4; Mark 8:11–12; John 6:30). They thought the

Messiah would be attested by striking manifestations of power and majesty. A crucified Messiah was a contradiction in terms.

The Greeks were absorbed in speculative philosophy. No names were more honoured among them than the names of their outstanding thinkers. From the lofty heights of their culture they looked down on and despised as barbarians all who failed to appreciate their wisdom. They took no notice of the fact that this wisdom often degenerated into meaningless sophistries (cf. Acts 17:21). They were proud of their intellectual acuteness and found no place for the gospel. Proctor refers to ‘the high intellectual perception of the Greek philosophers’ and to ‘the nobility of much of their writing’. But he adds, ‘Yet all this has no saving power for mankind.’

23. In contrast with this (but, *de*, is adversative, and *we*, *hēmeis*, is emphatic), Paul sets the preaching of Christ crucified. The verb preach (*kēryssō*) is that appropriate to the action of a herald. The message came from God, not the preacher. In this sense it is a peculiarly Christian term. It is used little, if at all, in this way in the classics, in *lxx*, or in current religious systems like the mystery religions (see TDNT, iii, pp. 697–700). Crucified is a perfect participle; not only was Christ once crucified, but he continues in the character of the crucified one. The crucifixion is permanent in its efficacy.

But the Jews will have none of it. To them a crucified Messiah was a complete impossibility, a stumbling block (Lenski thinks this too weak for *skandalon* and translates ‘deathtrap’). It was an occasion of offence (those hanged bore the curse of God, Deut. 21:23). It was no better with the Gentiles who saw it as foolishness, sheer unmitigated folly. God would never act like that! The crucifixion is the heart of the Christian faith, but it was acceptable neither to Jew nor to Gentile. Paul includes all mankind in the rejection of the crucified Messiah.

24. But the rejection is not the whole story. Those who are called, Jew or Greek, welcome the message. There is emphasis on ‘the called themselves’ (*rv mg.*); ‘themselves’ is in an emphatic position. The important thing is the divine initiative, the call of God. Here, as usually in Paul’s writings, called implies that the call has been heeded; it is an effectual call. Those called know that the crucified Christ means power. Before the call they were defeated by sin; now there is a new power at work in them, the power of God.

Christ is also the wisdom of God. The idea of wisdom runs through this passage; clearly the Corinthians had emphasized it. But to Greek intellectuals the cross was utter folly; it made no sense; there was no wisdom in it. Paul’s conjunction of power and wisdom is important. Had the way to God been through ‘wisdom’, Christianity would have opened the way to salvation only to the intellectually gifted. The power in the cross opens the way for the humblest to know God and to overcome evil, and that is a wisdom superior by far to anything the philosophers could produce. On the level of the search for wisdom the ‘foolishness’ of God proved to be the true wisdom.

25. So Paul rounds off this section with the conclusion that what in God proud man is wont to dub foolishness is wiser than man's wisdom. Paul does not use the word 'foolishness' (*mōria*) as in vv. 18, 21, 23, but says 'the foolish thing' (*mōron*), i.e. the cross. So with the weakness; the cross is 'the weak thing' of God that is stronger than anything man can produce.

The sign-seeking Jews were blind to the significance of the greatest sign of all when it was before them. The wisdom-loving Greeks could not discern the most profound wisdom of all when they were confronted with it.

2. The believers are insignificant (1:26–31)

The contradiction God's method offers to worldly wisdom is illustrated by the kind of people he has called. He might have concentrated on the intelligentsia or other outstanding people, but in fact he has chosen people with little to commend them from the worldly standpoint. His power works miracles in the most hopeless material and thus his wisdom excels the best that men can produce. Paul works this out, incidentally, in a way that has called forth tributes to his style (BDF 490 has comments on his 'artistry').

26. Paul directs his readers to reflect on the kind of person whom God has in fact called (the word points us to the divine initiative). The large number of unimportant people in the church did not come about because the only people who would become Christians were from the depressed classes. It came about because God chose to work his marvels through people who were, from the human point of view, the most unpromising. It is probably for the same reason that Paul begins with Not many of you were wise by human standards. Wisdom has been prominent in the discussion and clearly the Corinthians revered it in the typical Greek fashion. But Paul decisively rejects this as God's criterion for calling people. That is not to say that there were none from the classes Paul mentions. Not many implies that there were some, though not a large number (cf. Introduction, p. 24; as Deluz remarks, God a priori 'excludes no one from his Church'). That there were no wise people among the Christians is an accusation as old as Celsus and refuted by Origen (*Contra Celsum* III. 48; Celsus's attack on Christianity is dated c. ad 180, while Origen lived c. 185–254). The influential and those of noble birth are the leading figures in the community. But 'the things which elevate man in the world, knowledge, influence, rank, are not the things which lead to God and salvation' (Hodge).

27. The repetition of chose underlines the purpose of God. The change from the masculine (wise, influential and of noble birth are all masculine in the Greek) to the neuter, the foolish things, may concentrate on the quality of foolishness seen in these people, but it is probably also intended to include a reference to salvation by the cross (cf. v. 23). There is another change of gender to the masculine wise, i.e. 'wise men'; such men are shamed by the contrast between their estimate of themselves and what God's choice reveals. The Greek construction (*hina*) indicates purpose ('in order to shame'); Paul makes sure we do not overlook God's plan in all this. Some commentators

take of the world to mean ‘in the world’s opinion’, but this is to miss the sting in Paul’s words. God has not chosen only those whom the world counts foolish and weak: he has chosen those who really are foolish and weak in this world.

28. Lowly means ‘of lowly birth’, though often with the added notion of morally worthless (cf. 6:11). It is the direct opposite of ‘of noble birth’ in v. 26. The despised is a strong word, meaning ‘treated as of no account’ (Knox, ‘contemptible’). But the following expression is even stronger, the things that are not, ‘the “nothings” ’ (Orr and Walther), ‘those who in the eyes of the world did not exist’ (Erdman). God’s activity is creative. He makes out of what does not exist what is in accordance with his will. The verb rendered to nullify (*katargeō*) is not easy to translate. It occurs twenty-seven times in the New Testament and is translated in seventeen different ways in av. rv does away with seven of these, but brings in another three, and the process is repeated in subsequent translations (I have a list of eighty renderings from reputable translations). Basically it means something like ‘to render idle’ or ‘inoperative’. Here the meaning is that God has chosen the things that are not to render completely ineffective the things that are.

29. God does all this with a view to (*hopōs* indicates purpose) taking away from everyone every occasion of boasting. Whatever we may do before one another, we have nothing to boast of before God.

30. From the negative Paul turns to the positive. The saved are ‘of him’ (*ex autou*), where the preposition gives the idea of source. Their new life derives from God (cf. Rom. 9:11; 2 Cor. 5:17–18; Eph. 2:8). They are in Christ Jesus. Whole books have been written about this enigmatic phrase which Paul habitually uses to indicate the relationship between believers and Christ. Briefly, it shows that the believer is connected to his Lord in the closest possible fashion. Christ is the very atmosphere in which he lives. But we must not interpret this mechanically. Christ is a person. The phrase describes personal attachment to a personal Saviour. E. Best has shown that the expression has a corporate aspect. To be ‘in Christ’ is to be closely related to all those others who are also ‘in Christ’. It is to be part of the body of Christ. The adversative conjunction ‘but’ (*de*; see av; niv omits) and the emphatic you set believers in strong contrast to the worldly-wise of the preceding verses. The contrast with worldly wisdom comes out in another way when Christ is said to have become for us wisdom. Paul has already argued forcibly that the apparent ‘foolishness’ of the gospel is the true wisdom, and this is his thought here, too. The wisdom of God is embodied in Christ (cf. Col. 2:3), who offered himself that people might be saved. This is real wisdom, let the philosophers argue as they will.

Some see righteousness and the rest as co-ordinate with wisdom (e.g. av), but niv seems correct in taking them as explaining wisdom. Righteousness (there is no *our* in the Greek) in this context means the right standing Christ makes available for his own, ‘the state of having been justified’ (Edwards). Christ is our righteousness (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21). We know no other. We could

never attain holiness in our own strength, but Christ is holiness, too (cf. Rom. 6:19; 1 Thess. 4:3–7). And he is redemption (last with a certain emphasis, perhaps as pointing to the last great day, the consummation of redemption). He has paid the ransom price (cf. Mark 10:45) in his own body on Calvary.

31. There is nothing to justify boasting before God (v. 29), but we may boast in what Christ has done (cf. Gal. 6:14). Characteristically Paul proves his point from Scripture (Jer. 9:23–24). In the Old Testament the words refer to Yahweh; no higher view could be taken of the Person of Christ.

3. Paul's preaching was in divine power (2:1–5)

Paul reminds his hearers that when he was in their city his own preaching had conformed to what he has been saying about the 'foolishness' of the gospel. It had been a plain, unvarnished setting forth of the simple gospel. There had been nothing attractive about it. But precisely because it was so simple and unpretentious its results convincingly demonstrated the power of God.

1. The emphatic *kagō*, 'and I', stresses that Paul was not making an exception of himself. His preaching in Corinth had conformed to what he has just said. There seems no reason for *niv*'s taking superior with wisdom only; in the Greek it seems to apply to eloquence as well (cf. *rsv*). Paul is making no claims of superiority either for his speech, the way he presented his facts, or his wisdom, the way his mind marshalled his facts (Héring sees a reference to 'the arts of the rhetorician and philosopher'). As I proclaimed means 'in order to proclaim' (Conzelmann; cf. BDF 339 (2) (c)). There is the thought of purpose. Some mss read 'the mystery of God' (the word occurs again in v. 7, there translated 'secret'), but we should accept testimony (as in 1:6). Preaching the gospel is not delivering edifying discourses, beautifully put together. It is bearing witness to what God has done in Christ for our salvation.

2. As was his custom (cf. Gal. 3:1), Paul excluded not only from his preaching, but even from his knowledge, everything but that great central truth. He resolved to know among them nothing ... except Jesus Christ (the power and the wisdom of God, 1:24) and him crucified. The crucifixion is at the heart of the gospel (for the force of the perfect participle crucified see on 1:23). On that Paul concentrated.

3. From the message Paul turns to the manner of the preaching. He had had much to discourage him just before he came to Corinth (see Introduction, pp. 22f.). He must have been somewhat down-hearted, and this was reflected in his general manner. In any case the Corinthians were not very impressed by his personal presence (2 Cor. 10:10; in the second-century Acts of Paul and Thecla Paul is said to be 'a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked'). Paul says that he had been without strength and afraid, even to the point of trembling (Phillips, 'I was feeling far from strong, I was nervous and rather shaky'). He did not, of course, fear men; he feared God in the light of the task committed to him—it was what Kay calls 'anxious desire to fulfil his duty'.

4. It is not easy to see the difference between my message and my preaching. Message is literally ‘word’ and probably includes both the manner and the matter of the preaching (as in 1:18). Preaching means the content of the message (as in 1:21). Probably Paul is not differentiating between the two with any exactness (Conzelmann speaks of ‘rhetorical duplication’), but simply uses two terms to bring out both the way he preached and the content of his sermons. Persuasive translates a very unusual word (not found anywhere before this passage). Paul is denying that he used the methods of human wisdom when he preached. Rather, his preaching had been a clear demonstration of the power of the Spirit. The word translated demonstration (apodeixis) means the most rigorous proof. Some proofs indicate no more than that the conclusion follows from the premises, but with apodeixis ‘the premises are known to be true, and therefore the conclusion is not only logical, but certainly true’ (Robertson and Plummer). Paul’s very defects had afforded the most convincing demonstration of the power of the Spirit. Though there was nothing impressive about his preaching from a human standpoint, it had carried conviction: It was not human excellence that accomplished this, but the Spirit’s power (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9; for the linking of power with the Spirit, cf. Rom. 15:13; 1 Thess. 1:5; with the gospel, Rom. 1:16).

5. So that (hina) indicates purpose. Paul’s intention had been to ground his converts in the divine power and to make them independent of human wisdom. Wilson points out that ‘a faith that depends upon clever reasoning may be demolished by a more acute argument, but the faith which is produced by the power of God can never be overthrown’. So Paul had refused to employ rhetorical arts and had concentrated on the message that was so unpalatable to natural men, the message of the cross.

C. A revealed message (2:6–16)

1. The gospel is not human wisdom (2:6–9)

Up to this point Paul has been insisting that the gospel owes nothing to human wisdom. Both the message and the messengers were despised by this world’s ‘wise’ and ‘great’ ones. Now he emphasizes the truth that the gospel embodies true wisdom, the wisdom of God. Héring and others think that Paul is here contrasting simple Christians, who know the story of the cross, with the more ‘mature’ who go on to profound wisdom. But his words do not bear this out. He is developing the thought that the divine wisdom which brought about Christ’s saving act in the cross is the real wisdom, and further, that this wisdom is in total opposition to the worldly wisdom so beloved in Corinth.

6. However (de) introduces a contrast. Paul is rejecting ‘men’s wisdom’, but not all wisdom. Actually wisdom comes first in the Greek with emphasis: ‘Wisdom we speak’—even if the world does not recognize it! (The Greek has nothing corresponding to niv’s a message of.) The plural we, coming after two emphatic ‘I’s’ as it does (vv. 1, 3), is significant. It is not to be taken as equivalent to ‘I’ (as neb), but it links Paul with other Christian teachers in a common

understanding and proclamation of wisdom. They speak this wisdom among the mature (*teleioi*, which means those who have reached their end or aim, *telos*). Paul is possibly indulging in a little gentle irony at the expense of the Corinthians with their exalted estimate of their own spiritual state. More probably he is perfectly serious. Those who have welcomed the message of the cross are mature, whereas the worldly-minded who reject it are not. Conzelmann holds that Paul has in mind 'a higher class of believer' and that he is referring to a superior wisdom which only the more mature can receive. But Paul's contrast is rather between those who receive God's wisdom (the message of the cross) and those who do not (cf. Bornkamm, TDNT, iv, p. 819). Later Paul will face the fact that there are 'mere infants in Christ' (3:1), but that is not his concern at this point. And when he comes to it he will criticize the 'infants' for being deficient in love, not knowledge (cf. Bruce). The fact is that the New Testament writers do not envisage 'grades' of Christians. All believers should go on to maturity (Heb. 6:1). Some of the later Gnostics classified people into permanent groups according to their spiritual potential. They held that some were 'perfect', while others could never attain that standing. Paul is not making this kind of distinction. He is contrasting Christians (who have accepted the wisdom of the cross) with outsiders (who have not). It is mature to accept God's wise provision, even if the world sees it as folly.

With unwearied persistence the apostle points out that the wisdom of which he speaks is not the wisdom of this age. He has been stressing this for some time and he now adds of the rulers of this age. In antiquity Origen took this to refer to the demonic powers behind world rulers, an interpretation which Chrysostom rejected, and this difference of opinion has persisted through the centuries. Among modern commentators Conzelmann, for example, sees a reference to the demons, while Orr and Walther think of earthly rulers. The 'demonic' view sees Christ as engaged in a gigantic struggle with evil forces of the unseen world, a view which is undoubtedly to be found in Paul's writings (e.g. Rom. 8:38–39; Col. 2:15; cf. 2 Cor. 4:4). But it may be doubted whether this is his meaning here. Three points are especially important. One is that throughout this whole passage the contrast is between the wisdom of God shown in the gospel and the wisdom of this world. To introduce now the thought of the wisdom of demonic powers is to bring in an extraneous concept, and one that is out of harmony with v. 9, which clearly refers to humans. Paul could scarcely have expected his readers to grasp this without one word of explanation. A second is that it was the rulers of this age who are said to have crucified Christ and this same word rulers, *archontes*, is repeatedly used of the Jewish and Roman leaders (Acts 3:17; 4:5, 8, 26; Rom. 13:3, etc.). The third is that it is explicitly said that they carried out the crucifixion in ignorance (Acts 3:17; 13:27; cf. John 16:3), but, by contrast, the demons are often said to have known who Jesus was when people did not (Mark 1:24, 34, etc.). Paul habitually ascribes power to the demonic forces, but not ignorance. The very concept of a struggle between

demonic forces and the power of God implies that the demons knew what they were up against. Paul's use of this age probably points to the transitory nature of the office of rulers, over against the truth of the gospel, which is permanent. This transitoriness is also in mind in the concluding who are coming to nothing (the verb is *katargeō*; see on 1:28). The rulers are being rendered completely ineffective; their vaunted power and wisdom are made null and void.

7. No is the strong adversative *alla*. The wisdom we speak is certainly not 'the wisdom of this age'; it is God's wisdom, and the word God is in an emphatic position. Secret translates *en mystēriō*, 'in a mystery', where 'mystery' does not mean a puzzle we find difficult to solve. It means a secret we are wholly unable to penetrate, but which God has now revealed: 'God's pre-temporal counsel which is hidden from the world but revealed to the spiritual' (Bornkamm, TDNT, iv, p. 820). At one and the same time it points to the impossibility of our knowing God's secret, and to the love of God which makes that secret known to us. The wisdom has been hidden (the perfect participle denotes a continuing state). Where unbelievers are concerned it remains hidden; they are still in the dark about it. It is revealed to believers, but it is not a matter of common knowledge among members of the human family.

Paul proceeds to stress the truth that the gospel is no afterthought. It was planned in the mind of God before time began (cf. Eph. 3:2–12). Destined translates the verb *proorizō*, which means 'to foreordain'. It stresses the plan of God and the sovereignty of God. For our glory adds the thoughts of the tenderness of God and of our supernatural destiny (cf. Rom. 8:18). Before time began God was concerned for our well-being; he planned the gospel that would bring us into glory.

8. God's secret was not known by any way other than revelation. For all their eminence the rulers of this age did not know it, as is shown by the fact that they crucified Jesus (cf. Acts 3:17; 4:25–28, and Jesus' words, 'they do not know what they are doing', Luke 23:34). Had they really understood who Jesus was and the consequent enormity of rejecting him, they would never have done what they did. The Lord of glory ('the Lord whose essential attribute is glory', Ellicott) is an outstanding and unusual title, applied to Christ only here (though Jas 2:1 is similar). The epithet of glory is applied to the Father (Acts 7:2; Eph. 1:17), and in the apocryphal Book of Enoch the expression the Lord of glory is used of God several times (22:14; 25:3; 27:3–4; 63:2; 75:3). More than one scholar has thought that this is the loftiest title Paul ever applied to Christ. It stands fitly alongside the application to him of words originally referring to Yahweh (1:31). Both show that Paul habitually assigned to Christ the highest place of all.

9. It is difficult to know the source of this quotation. The formula as it is written (*kathōs gegraptai*) is one Paul uses when citing Scripture, but there is no passage in the Old Testament that runs exactly like this. Perhaps the nearest is Isaiah 64:4, though some see parts of Psalm 31:20; Isaiah 52:15; 65:17 (note that 'mind' here is 'heart' in lxx). From the time of Origen some

have thought that Paul was quoting from The Apocalypse of Elias, an apocryphal book now lost, or from The Ascension of Isaiah, but it is far from certain that either was in existence at the time (cf. TDNT, iii, pp. 988–989; v, p. 557). Another view is that it is a saying of Jesus not recorded in our Gospels. That there were such sayings is indisputable (cf. John 21:25), but whether Paul would cite them in this way is another matter. Where was this one written? On the whole it seems best to think of this as a rather free citation of Isaiah 64:4, with reminiscences of other scriptural passages.

Mind translates *kardia*, ‘heart’ (so *av*). But ‘heart’ does not stand for the emotions as with us; among the Greeks the seat of the emotions was rather the intestines (cf. ‘bowels of compassion’), while thought was located in the midriff, the diaphragm. ‘Heart’ stood for the whole of the inner life, including thought and will as well as the emotions, though sometimes it leans to one or another of these. Here the mind is perhaps most in view (TDNT, iii, p. 612 classes this passage under ‘the seat of understanding, the source of thought and reflection’). Paul is saying that there is no method of apprehension open to us (eyes, ears, or understanding) which can give any idea of the wonderful things that God has made ready for those who love him (cf. Rom. 8:28). ‘Not *gnōsis* but love is the touchstone of Christian maturity and spirituality’ (Barrett). The verb has prepared reinforces the earlier thought that God is working out his plan (v. 7). The glories that come to believers are not haphazard, but are in accordance with God’s plan from of old.

2. Words ‘taught by the Spirit’ (2:10–13)

Paul brings out the divine origin of the message by stressing the role of the Holy Spirit.

10. To us comes first in the Greek with emphasis; it is not the learned philosophers but the humble Christians to whom God’s truth has been revealed. That it is revealed takes away all suggestion of superiority. There can be no feeling of pride when it is clear that all is of God. Believers can claim no special skill or insight, only that God has revealed truth to them.

Paul proceeds to emphasize the activity of the Spirit. He has mentioned him only once up till now, but in vv. 10–14 he speaks of him six times. It is the Spirit who made the revelation. And the Spirit searches all things, which means, not that he conducts searches with a view to obtaining information, but that he penetrates all things. There is nothing beyond his knowledge. In particular Paul specifies the deep things of God. Deep is often used of the mighty depths of the sea, and thus comes to mean the ‘unfathomable’. It is impossible for any creature to know the innermost depths of the divine counsel, ‘the depths of God’. But they are known to the Spirit, the Spirit who has revealed the truths of which Paul speaks.

11. The Spirit’s insight into the mind of God is brought out by an analogy from the nature of man. Nobody can really know what is going on in a man’s mind, nobody but the man’s own spirit. From outside we can but guess. But the spirit of the man does not guess. He knows. In the same way, reasons Paul, no-one outside God can know what takes place within God, nobody but

the Spirit of God. The Spirit knows God from the inside. This ascribes full deity to the Spirit. And it shows that the revelation of which Paul has been speaking is authentic. Because the Spirit who reveals is truly God, what he reveals is the truth of God.

12. Once again an emphatic we contrasts Christians with ‘wise’ heathen. Whatever be the case with others, we are led by God’s Spirit. Some understand the spirit of the world to mean Satan, and this would give an excellent sense. However, Satan does not seem to be referred to in just this way (though ‘the prince of this world’, John 12:31, comes near to it, and cf. Eph. 2:2). Further, it goes beyond what is required by the context. Throughout this passage Paul is opposing a ‘wisdom’ that is not satanic but human. It seems that we should accept some such meaning as ‘the spirit of human wisdom’, ‘the temper of this world’ (Lenski, ‘It is what makes the world “world” ’). Believers have not received the spirit of worldly wisdom. In passing we notice that the word for world here is kosmos, ‘the ordered universe’, not aiōn, ‘age’ (as in vv. 7–8), which means the world in its temporal aspect.

We who are Christ’s have received the Spirit who is from God (cf. Gal. 3:2), and this brings the assurance that we have real knowledge. The Christian’s certainty is a certainty of faith, but that does not make it any the less a certainty. He has understanding of what God has freely given us.

13. And what we receive we pass on; the revealed truths are spoken by believers to others. This is not done in words taught us by human wisdom; the worldly-wise way is not the way to commend the truth of God. Rather, we teach in words taught by the Spirit. The Spirit’s activity extends to providing the actual words used, and is not confined to the supplying of general ideas (cf. Mark 13:11). As Moule says, the expression ‘is a very bold but quite unambiguous use of the Subjective Genitive’ (IBNTG, p. 40); the Spirit teaches the words.

This probably gives us the clue to the difficult expression that follows. It is fairly clear that the participle synkrinontes should be rendered ‘combining’. It can mean ‘comparing’ (2 Cor. 10:12), but this is not usual and should be adopted only if the context plainly indicates it, which is not the case here. A surprising number prefer ‘interpreting’ or the like (e.g. rsv, neb, Moffatt), but it would seem without sufficient reason. This meaning is found only in lxx, and there only of interpreting dreams. In each case the context makes this plain. It cannot be said to be a common meaning of the verb. We should retain the usual meaning, ‘combining’.

We are to combine ‘spiritual things with spiritual (pneumatikois pneumatika)’. There is no question about ‘spiritual things’ (niv, spiritual truths), for pneumatika is neuter. But pneumatikois might be neuter or masculine. If neuter it means ‘combining spiritual things with spiritual things’, which probably signifies linking spiritual truths to spiritual words. If it is masculine we get combining spiritual truths with either ‘spiritual men’ or ‘spiritual words’ (since ‘word’ is masculine in the Greek). There seems no good reason for accepting a reference to men, so in one

way or another Paul is saying that Christians combine ‘spiritual things’ with ‘spiritual words’. They use words taught by the Spirit.

3. Spiritual discernment (2:14–16)

The presence of the Spirit makes all the difference. Without that, people lack discernment; with it they have the root of the matter within them.

14. The man without the Spirit (‘the natural man’, *av*) has his limitations. *Psychikos*, ‘natural’, refers to the animal life. There is nothing inherently evil about it; it does not mean ‘sinful’. But it does point to an absence of spiritual discernment, to the man whose horizon is bounded by this life (BAGD, ‘one who lives on the purely material plane, without being touched by the Spirit of God’). It is the worldly-wise man again, the one who has been so much in Paul’s thoughts throughout this passage. This man does not accept the things of the Spirit. The verb (*dechomai*) has an air of welcome about it; it is the usual word for the reception of a guest. But ‘the natural man’ does not welcome the things of the Spirit; he refuses them, he rejects them. He is not equipped to discern the activities of God’s Spirit; to him they are no more than foolishness (cf. 1:18, 21, 23). Paul goes so far as to say that it is quite impossible for him to understand them (cf. John 8:47). The reason is that they are spiritually discerned. The verb, *anakrinō* (ten times in 1 Corinthians, nowhere else in Paul) ‘is used of judicial investigation, especially prior to the hearing proper’ (TDNT, iii, p. 943; the corresponding noun is used of such a preliminary hearing in Acts 25:26). It comes to mean ‘to scrutinize’, ‘to examine’, and so ‘to judge of,’ ‘to estimate’. It may be that the use of a verb proper to a preliminary examination is by way of reminding us that all human verdicts are no more than preliminary. It is God who gives the final verdict. Anyone whose equipment is only of this world, who has not received the Holy Spirit, has no ability to make an estimate of things spiritual. ‘The unspiritual are out of court as religious critics; they are deaf men judging music’ (Findlay).

15. By contrast the spiritual man can form a judgment on all things. Paul is not, of course, referring to someone with a different natural endowment from the one he has just been considering. It is not a question of natural endowment, but of the working of the Spirit of God within him. When the Spirit enters the life everything is changed and one new thing that appears is the ability to make a right judgment. This does not mean that the man has acquired greatness; it means that the Spirit of God is guiding him. He has the point of reference within himself and is thus able to make judgments about all things. The force of all should not be overlooked. The spiritual principle is the basis of judgment on what we call the secular as well as the sacred.

Not subject to any man’s judgment is to be taken in the sense ‘any natural man’. It is clear from the whole tenor of Paul’s writings that he did not hold that men in whom was the Spirit of God could not be called upon to account for their actions (cf. 14:29). Much of this epistle is a criticism, if a loving and spiritual criticism, of spiritual men. His point is that the spiritual man

cannot be judged by the natural man for precisely the same reason that he himself can judge all things. He has the Spirit of God within him and the natural man has not. This makes him an enigma to the natural man. What does the natural man know of spiritual things? Because he cannot know spiritual things (v. 14), he cannot judge spiritual people.

16. This impossibility is shown by a question quoted from Isaiah 40:13. Paul has already spoken of the impossibility of knowing 'the things of God' (v. 11). Then his concern was to show that the Spirit does indeed have complete knowledge of 'the depths of God', and that is relevant here. As none but the Spirit knows these depths it is clearly impossible for the natural man to have knowledge of the person in whom is the Spirit, and who therefore, in a sense, shares in the divine (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4). It is because of this that Paul can make the bold assertion that we (the pronoun is emphatic) have the mind of Christ. He does not mean that every Christian can understand all Christ's thoughts. He means that the indwelling Spirit reveals Christ. The spiritual person accordingly does not see things from the viewpoint of the worldly. He sees them from the viewpoint of Christ.

Notice that the question in Isaiah 40:13 refers to the mind of Yahweh. But Paul moves easily to the mind of Christ, so closely does he associate the two.

D. Misunderstanding of leadership (3:1–9)

1. Baby Christians (3:1–4)

The conduct of the Corinthians shows that they have not progressed in the faith, but are still 'infants'.

1. The affectionate address Brothers softens the rebuke Paul is about to make; he must make it, but he makes it in love. In the days of the mission in Corinth he had not been able to address them as spiritual; in those early days the kind of maturity he has just been speaking about had not been possible. The converts had been worldly (*sarkinos*, which means 'fleshy, (made) of flesh', BAGD), which Paul explains as mere infants in Christ. There was nothing wrong in this at that time. It is inevitable that those who have just been won for Christ should be mere infants in Christ. Maturity comes from growth and development. It takes time. Beginners in the faith cannot be mature.

2. Paul taught them then in accordance with their position as 'infants'. It is not possible to speak 'wisdom among the mature' (2:6) when addressing potential converts and new converts. Paul gave them then milk, not solid food (cf. Heb. 5:12; 1 Pet. 2:2). He did not push the infant believers beyond their capacity, but gave them the teaching that was suited to their state. There was nothing blameworthy in their being 'not yet ready for it'. But it is otherwise when he says you are still not ready. Indeed (*all' oude*) is a strong expression 'used to introduce an additional point in an emphatic way' (BDF 448(6)). The present situation is different. It was all very well

for the Corinthians to have been in the position of ‘infants’ when they actually were ‘infants’. But they should have outgrown that state long since.

3. Paul gets to the root of the matter with his accusation that they are still worldly. He has changed his word for worldly from *sarkinos* (v. 1) to *sarkikos*. The *-inos* termination means ‘made of ...’; thus tablets ‘made of stone’, *lithinos*, are contrasted with those ‘made of flesh’, *sarkinos* (2 Cor. 3:3). The *-ikos* ending rather means ‘characterized by ...’; we see it in *psychikos* of the ‘natural’ man and *pneumatikos* of the ‘spiritual’ man (2:14–15). The difference between *sarkinos* and *sarkikos* is like that between ‘fleshy’ and ‘fleshly’ (cf. Lenski, ‘“fleshy,” and you cannot help it; “fleshly,” and you can but do not help it’). The more thoroughgoing word is *sarkinos*, but there is no blame attaching to it as applied to those who are young in the faith. But *sarkikos*, ‘characterized by flesh’, when used of those who have been Christians for years, is blameworthy. The mature believer is *pneumatikos*, ‘characterized by spirit’. To be characterized instead by flesh, as the Corinthians were, is the very opposite of what Christians should be. ‘Flesh’, of course, as often in Paul, is used in an ethical and moral sense. It indicates the lower aspects of human nature (cf. Rom. 13:14; Gal. 5:13, 19; Eph. 2:3, etc.).

The accusation is made specific: there is jealousy and quarrelling. The former word means basically something like ‘zeal’, ‘ardour’. It is usually ranked as a virtue by classical writers, and sometimes also by New Testament writers (e.g. 2 Cor. 7:7; 11:2). But this temper all too easily leads to envy and the like, and characteristically the New Testament writers use the word for that evil thing that is one of ‘the works of the flesh’ (Gal. 5:20). For quarrelling, cf. 1:11. Both terms point to self-assertion and unhealthy rivalries. Whereas Christians should be considerate of others (cf. Rom. 12:10), the Corinthians were asserting themselves (cf. 4:8). Paul asks whether this is not worldly (*sarkikos*), and acting like mere men. This last expression means ‘like natural men’ (2:14).

4. For gives the reason for this. When is the indefinite *hotan*, ‘whenever’; each time such an affirmation is made Paul’s point is demonstrated over again. It is not clear why he repeats the catch-cries of only two of the parties, but it may be significant that he selects those of Apollos (who might be thought to be close to him, cf. 4:6), and himself. Again he asks, are you not mere men? (Moffatt, ‘what are you but men of the world?’). Their outlook is that of worldly wisdom, not that of Spirit-filled men. Paul has been hammering away at this ever since he introduced the matter of the dissensions (1:10–12). The divisions were a standing witness to the worldly mentality of the Corinthians, not to their spiritual perception. Where they should have been ‘spiritual’ (2:15) or ‘mature’ (2:6), they were but ‘fleshly’.

2. The true relation between Paul and Apollos (3:5–9)

Paul proceeds to develop the thought that people like himself and Apollos are no more than servants, depending on one another and on God. It is God who brings about spiritual growth.

5. The neuter What (cf. 'anything', v. 7) where we expect 'Who' takes attention away from the persons of the preachers and concentrates it on their functions. Servants translates diakonoi, a term which originally meant a table waiter. It came to be used of lowly service generally, and in the New Testament it is often used of the service that any Christian should render to God. In time it was applied to one of the regular orders of the ministry, the deacon, but this is not an example of that use. The term stresses the lowly character of the service rendered and ridicules the tendency to make much of preachers. Who would set servants on pedestals? The real work is done by God; Paul and Apollos are no more than instruments through whom he does his work. These ministers could work only 'as the Lord gave' to them.

6–8. The process is likened to agriculture. Paul planted and Apollos watered (the same verb as that rendered 'gave' in v. 2), but neither made the plants grow. The comparative unimportance of their work is clear. It is only God who made it grow. This verb is imperfect, whereas those for planting and watering are aorist. The work of Paul and Apollos is viewed as completed, but God's activity in giving the increase goes on.

Having established this important point, Paul proceeds to draw conclusions. Neither the planter nor the waterer is important (Conzelmann says this breaks up the Paul and Apollos parties; 'Both lose their heads!'). The attention of the Corinthians should have been fastened on God, who alone effects all spiritual work, and not on his unimportant instruments. Further, there is an essential unity between planter and waterer. Obviously the work of neither can be successful without that of the other. So far from being rivals, Paul maintains that he and Apollos have one purpose (really, 'are one'). This does not minimize their distinctive contributions; Paul goes on to point out that each has his own responsibility. Each will receive his own 'wage' (so, rather than be rewarded for misthos; BAGD defines the word as 'pay, wages'; cf. Luke 10:7), and that according to his own labour. Only God, of course, can determine what the 'wage' will be; it is not for us to try to work out who is deserving of more! Notice further that the criterion is not 'his success', nor 'how he compares with others', but his own labour.

9. Three times in this verse the word God comes first: 'God's fellow-workers are we; God's field, God's building are you.' This puts strong emphasis on the divine action. Ministers and those they serve are no more than God's instruments. All is of God and all belong to God. The Greek translated we are God's fellow-workers could be understood as 'we are partners working together for God' (gnb), which would suit the context very well. Despite its attractiveness, however, we should probably not accept it, for the more natural way to understand the Greek is God's fellow-workers (cf. Mark 16:20). It is a startling expression, which sets forth in striking fashion the dignity of Christian service. As someone has said, 'Without God, we cannot; without us, he will not.'

The word for field, *geōrgion*, occurs only here in the New Testament. It can mean field ('farm', Orr and Walther; 'garden', *neb*), or the process of cultivation. There is a similar ambiguity about *oikodomē*, building, which may signify the edifice or the process of erection. Either sense is suitable here. Paul may be saying that the Corinthians are the field, the building, in which God is at work, or that they are that work in cultivation and building. Incidentally, the metaphor of building is a favourite one with Paul, but it is not often found in the New Testament outside his writings.

E. The foundation and the building (3:10–17)

1. The test of good building (3:10–15)

Paul develops the thought of building, his emphasis being on the quality of the materials used. With Christ as the foundation of the Christian life, it is important that the building be worthy.

10. Paul ascribes his work at Corinth to the grace God has given. Grace means more than 'commission' (Moffatt, Goodspeed), or 'gift' (*gnb*), or 'kindness' (*lb*). Such translations miss the thought of God's enabling power. Paul insists on the primacy of God and the insignificance of God's ministers. He speaks of himself as an expert builder, where expert translates *sophos*, 'wise' (which recalls the discussion of 'wisdom' in chs. 1, 2). Builder is *architektōn*, the man who superintends the work of building. Plato differentiates him from the *ergastikos*, 'workman', as one who contributes knowledge rather than labour (Robertson and Plummer). Paul laid the foundation, but someone else was carrying on the work of building. Paul cautions every builder to be careful. Each one (*hekastos*, twice more in v. 13) points to individual responsibility. Many commentators restrict the application of this passage to the work of teachers, and it surely has special reference to their work. But the words seem capable of more general application and vv. 16–17 certainly refer to a wider circle. It is true of every believer that he is building on the one foundation. Let him be careful how he builds. Exactly what is being built? Some, impressed by the emphasis on right teaching, think it is sound doctrine. Others see a reference to building the church, or building up Christian character. Probably none is completely out of mind, and it is best to see the reference as quite general.

11. Paul does not leave the foundation open to choice, with the implication that he just happened to lay the foundation he did. There is only one possible foundation and that is already laid, namely Jesus Christ. That is basic. No-one can begin anywhere else, a truth still worthy of emphasis in the light of attempts to build 'Christianity' without Christ, on a foundation of good works, or humanism, or the like.

12. But if there can be only one foundation it is otherwise with the superstructure. It is all too possible for astonishing varieties to make their appearance. Paul lists several materials which may be used for building, and ingenuity has sometimes been exercised in trying to find edifying meanings for them all. Such labour is probably in vain, for Paul seems concerned simply with

two classes, the valuable, typified by gold, silver, costly stones, and the worthless, the wood, hay or straw. The workman may try to make the building as worthy of the foundation as possible. Or, in slovenly fashion, he may be content to put into it that which costs him little or nothing. Costly stones may be 'precious stones' used for ornamentation, or costly building materials, like marble.

13. There will come a time of testing for all we build. The Day is not further defined, but clearly it is the day when Christ returns, the day of judgment (cf. 1 Thess. 5:4; Heb. 10:25). That day is often referred to in terms of the believer's joy at being united to the Lord. But it will also be a time when the work God's people have done will be judged. Here the thought is that of a searching test, one likened to fire. The picture is that of fire sweeping through a building. It consumes what is combustible, but leaves metal and stone. The quality of the work will be shown, for the Day will bring it to light, 'show it in its true character', 'reveal it for what it is'. The 'it' in It will be revealed may be the work, but is more probably the Day. The meaning is 'the Day reveals itself (or, is revealed) in fire' (cf. Mal. 4:1); the present tense perhaps gives a greater sense of certainty.

14–15. The test in fire will determine whether or not a man will receive a 'wage' (*misthos*, see on v. 8; here it is the wage of the building worker whose work is approved; cf. Luke 19:16–19; Rev. 22:12). All those considered here are saved, for they have built on the one foundation, Jesus Christ. Even of the one whose work is burnt up it is said that he himself will be saved. The distinction is not between the lost and the saved, but among the saved between those who have built well and those who have built poorly. He will suffer loss means he will lose his wage, a workman fined for poor workmanship. Being saved 'as through fire' (*rsv*) may have been a proverbial expression to indicate one saved and no more (like the brand plucked from the burning, Amos 4:11; Zech. 3:2). The imagery is that of one who has to dash through the flames to escape to safety. The fire is, of course, a fire of testing, not one of purifying, and the passage lends no support to the doctrine of purgatory as some claim (see Godet for a refutation).

2. The temple of God (3:16–17)

Paul brings out the sacredness of the community of believers by likening the building to a temple in which God dwells.

16. Don't you know introduces a mild rebuke and is a device Paul uses ten times in this letter (and once only elsewhere). It introduces a question on a matter which ought to be common knowledge. Believers are God's temple, which makes it clear that Paul is addressing the whole church, not teachers only. There is no article with temple in the Greek, but this does not imply that there are several temples (though Godet renders 'a temple of God', saying 'The Church of Corinth is not the universal Church'). It simply puts a certain emphasis on their character as God's temple. There are two Greek words for 'temple', *hieron*, which includes all the temple precincts, and *naos* (used here) which denotes the shrine proper, the sanctuary. It points to the

very presence of God. This is brought out explicitly with the assertion that God's Spirit lives in the Corinthian believers. The expression 'the Spirit of God' is not common. It emphasizes the connection of the Spirit with the Father and underlines the deity of the Spirit. The Spirit is God as he dwells in his church. The words are sometimes applied to the individual believer, but the thought is rather that the whole community of believers is God's shrine. Temple is singular, but you is plural; the reference is to the church (the individual is also God's temple, as we see from 6:19, but that is not the thought here).

17. The seriousness of the divisions at Corinth is seen in the light of this understanding of the church. Because it is God's temple anyone who fails to react rightly towards it is guilty of no light sin. The repetition of the verb destroy shows that the punishment is not arbitrary; it 'fits the crime'. To engage in making divisions is to destroy the divine society and thus to invite God to destroy the sinner. The word is not specific and cannot be pressed to mean either annihilation or eternal torment. It simply makes it clear that one who commits a grave sin lays himself open to a grave penalty. In v. 15 the bad workman is yet saved. Here a greater sin than inferior workmanship is in mind, and salvation is excluded. Sacred (*hagios*) means something like 'set apart for God'. In the plural it is the usual New Testament word for the 'saints', those who are God's people. The word draws attention to the character of the church as God's own possession, so that its 'destruction' is a very serious matter. The concluding words, 'such are you' may be understood as *niv*, you are that temple, or 'of such kind are you' (Lenski). Either way, you is emphatic (both by the use of the pronoun and by coming last in the sentence); it brings home the character and hence the responsibility of the readers.

F. The preachers' lowly place (3:18–4:13)

1. Worldly wisdom is foolishness (3:18–23)

Paul further rebukes the divisions in the Corinthian church by showing that the preachers, whom they have set up so high, are really very lowly. He leads up to this with a further treatment of the 'foolishness' of worldly 'wisdom', a subject which has occupied him already and which is important enough to be treated again. The things of God are not to be estimated in accordance with the rules of the philosophers.

18. Paul calls for realism: Do not deceive yourselves (this verb occurs in Paul six times and nowhere else in the New Testament). The present imperative suggests that some were in fact deceiving themselves; they should stop it. Clearly some of the Corinthians saw themselves as wise in attaching themselves to a particular teacher. But such 'wisdom' accords with the standards of this age, a transient affair as the word itself hints. In the Greek 'among you' immediately precedes 'in this age'; the two are set in contrast. The believer is both in the church and in the world, but his relationships to the two are different. Paul counsels the reader to become a 'fool' so that he may become wise. If anyone is to have genuine spiritual insight he

must become what the world calls ‘a fool’. True wisdom is found in renouncing ‘the wisdom of this world’ (cf. 2:14–15).

19. Paul had asked, ‘Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?’ (1:20). He returns to the thought with his assertion that the world’s wisdom is foolishness in God’s sight. He comes back to this again and again. The worldly-wise, whom the Corinthians held in such high esteem, are totally unable to understand ‘the wisdom of God’ (1:24), though the humblest believer can appreciate it. God’s wisdom is for ever hidden from the wise of this world; their wisdom is but foolishness where it counts, i.e. in God’s sight. Is this Paul’s private opinion? Not at all. Scripture says so. Paul quotes Job 5:13 in a version differing from lxx and which may be his own translation from the Hebrew. *Panourgia*, craftiness, originally meant ‘a readiness to do anything’. From this it developed a meaning rather like our ‘cunning’; it might be used in a good sense, but the bad sense tended to predominate. Paul is not minimizing the capacity of the worldly-wise within their own field. But he stoutly denies that their craftiness is of any value when they stand before God. ‘Though craftiness may deceive men, it cannot deceive God’ (Hillyer).⁴

20. In the second quotation (Ps. 94:11) it is not certain whether Paul has substituted the wise for ‘men’ to bring out the best that the world can do, or whether he is quoting from a manuscript which no longer survives. His point is that God knows the thoughts of every one. Nothing can be hidden from him. Moreover he knows the emptiness of such thoughts; they are futile (*mataioi*; ‘without result’, ‘fruitless’). The ‘wise’ are unable to effect any solid achievement. The end result of their vaunted wisdom is futility. It is all concerned with things that pass away.

21–22. Paul turns the thoughts of the Corinthians away from the wisdom of men that had meant so much to them; no more boasting about men! For Paul there was a legitimate place for boasting (1:31), but he does not find it in men. The Corinthians were glorying in the creature; the Christian glories in the Creator.

Paul, however, does not develop his argument in that direction. Rather he reasons, ‘Why do you limit yourselves by claiming that you belong to a particular teacher? Do you not realize that all teachers, indeed all things that are, belong to you in Christ?’ So far from enriching themselves by staking their claim to exclusive rights in one teacher, the Corinthians were impoverishing themselves. They were cutting themselves off from greater treasures that were really theirs. Paul says All things are yours, not simply ‘all Christian teachers’. He puts no limit to their possessions in Christ (cf. Rom. 8:32, 38–39). Diogenes Laertius could say, ‘all things belong to the wise’ (vii. 125), but Paul’s horizon is broader. He is not confining himself to the things of this world (as Diogenes was), as his next words show.

The apostle particularizes by referring first to the three teachers to whom the Corinthians claimed to belong. So far from being outstanding people at the head of large and influential parties, the teachers are yours. They belong to those whose ministers they are (‘minister’=‘servant’; see on v.

5). In a lyrical passage Paul goes on to assure his friends that they possess all things, present or to come. The world (kosmos) is the ordered physical universe (here the word is not used in the ethical sense). We find the clue to the references to life and death in Paul's saying, 'to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain' (Phil. 1:21). Life in Christ is the only real life. And Christ has overcome death, so that for the Christian it is not disaster but 'gain' (cf. 15:55–57), though to the unbeliever it is the end of everything. Thrall comments, 'Every possible experience in life, and even the experience of death itself, belongs to Christians, in the sense that in the end it will turn out to be for their good.' The present and the future add up to an impressive total. Paul does not mention the past, perhaps because we were not responsible for it and we can do nothing about it. But it is otherwise with the present and the future. These belong to the Christian; he rejoices to co-operate with the purpose of God in both. Paul rounds off his list of our possessions with the comprehensive all are yours.

23. But he does not stop there. Believers have great possessions, certainly. But only because they are Christ's. We should probably translate *de* by 'but' (*jb*) rather than *and*. Paul is not adding another to the list of possessions, but by contrast turning to responsibilities (cf. 6:19–20). Believers should live lives of service befitting those who 'are Christ's' (*niv* has you are of Christ, but the possessive is like that in the previous verses); their lives should tell forth what they are. The self-assertiveness of the Corinthians was out of character for Christians. They were acting as though they were their own masters, whereas they really belonged to Christ.

The passage reaches its climax with 'Christ is God's'. We have noticed more than once how Paul sets Christ on a level with the Father. This passage does not contradict such teaching, for Paul is not speaking of Christ as he is in his essential nature, but with reference to his saving work. He does not lose sight of the deity of the Son. But he does not lose sight either of the truth that the Son became man, and took a lowly place that he might bring about our salvation. There is a strong statement of this subordination in 15:28. There, as here, the thought is that the Son did indeed take a place among men when he took upon him to deliver man. He, too, is God's.

2. God's commendation is what matters (4:1–5)

From the glorious possessions of the Corinthians Paul turns to the preachers. He shows that the judgment of men on ministers (and 'men' includes the partisan Corinthians) is of no importance. It is before God that they stand or fall, and only God is able to give a true and valid judgment on them.

1. So then roots the argument in what has just been said. Given these truths about Christian service, certain things follow about the apostles. People should see them as servants of Christ, where servants is not the word used in 3:5 (*diakonos*), but *hypēretēs* (which Paul uses only here). It meant originally an 'underrower', i.e. one who rowed in the lower part of a large ship. From this it came to signify service in general, though generally service of a lowly kind

(‘subordinates’, neb), and subject to direction. The preachers are also those entrusted with the secret things of God. Those entrusted with translates *oikonomoi*, a term which refers to the person who supervised a large estate (‘administrators’, Héring; ‘managers’, Goodspeed). Unless he was to be a slave to his slaves, a rich landowner had to find someone to do the routine work of running the estate. This deputy was called an *oikonomos* (cf. Luke 16:1). He held a responsible position; he was set over others and directed the day-to-day affairs. But he was subject to a master and was often a slave. Then in relation to the master he was a slave, but in relation to the slaves he was the master. For secret things (*mystēriōn*) see on 2:7. The sphere of the preachers’ responsibility is God’s revelation.

2. Paul appeals to contemporary practice with regard to *oikonomoi*. In the nature of the case the work of such a man was not closely supervised; if the master was to check up on everything he might as well do the job himself. The prime requirement in an *oikonomos* accordingly was that he be faithful (‘trustworthy’, neb). This applies to all believers, not just apostles, as we see from the use of the word of Christians generally (1 Pet. 4:10).

3. ‘To me’ comes first in the Greek with emphasis; Paul contrasts his attitude to that of the Corinthians. They valued human judgments highly; Paul dismissed them. The preachers were indeed the servants of the Corinthians, but the Corinthians were not their masters. Their only Master is God. So it is a very small matter what the Corinthians think of them, or for that matter what anyone else thinks of them (cf. Rom. 14:4). *Am judged* renders the verb *anakrinō*, used in 2:14f. (where see notes). Strictly it means not final judgment, but the critical preliminary examination that leads up to that judgment (Moffatt, ‘cross-question’). Paul is not interested in any preliminary human sifting; he prefers to await the Judge. Human court translates a curious expression meaning literally ‘human day’ (cf. Acts 28:23). It is found on an amulet of the second or third century (cited in BAGD), but as far as I know nowhere else. ‘Day’ seems to point us to a day of judgment (cf. 3:13; cf. also our ‘day in court’). Paul is saying that it matters little to him whether people pass a judgment on him or not. ‘This does not mean that he was not hurt by their criticism, but that he was not moved by it’ (Wilson).

He takes this to its logical conclusion; his own judgment is irrelevant. It is, of course, very difficult to make an accurate assessment of one’s own achievement, and Paul’s point is that in any case it does not matter. His own views about himself are as irrelevant as are those of anyone else. The Christian is to be judged by his Master. Introspection is not the way forward. Often people think that they know exactly what their spiritual state is and just what their service for God has effected. The result may depress beyond reason or exalt beyond measure; neither is relevant. It is not the task of the servant to pass such judgments, but rather to get on with the job of serving the Lord. This does not, of course, mean that there is no place for times of heart-

searching and self-scrutiny with a view to more whole-hearted and more efficient service. It is the attempt to anticipate the verdict of the Lord that Paul is condemning.

4. niv omits 'for' (gar) which ties this in with the preceding argument. Paul is not aware of any great matter in which he has failed in his Christian service, but he does not rest his confidence in that. Make me innocent translates *dedikaiōmai*, a legal word which means 'acquitted' (jb), 'declared "not guilty" '. Paul delights to use it of the believer's standing in the sight of God; it is the ordinary word for 'justify'. Here it is probably not used in this technical sense; rather Paul is saying that the verdict on whether he had been faithful in his ministry was given by the Lord, not his own conscience. Judges is *anakrinō* once more. While there is no emphasis here on the preliminary character of the judging, it accords with the meaning of this verb that the final judgment does not appear until the next verse. The Lord, as commonly in Paul, denotes the Lord Jesus (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10).

5. Arising from all this is an exhortation not to judge (*krinō*) prematurely. The use of *mē* with the present imperative may imply that the Corinthians had been engaging in this activity. 'Stop judging' is then the force of it. *Till* renders *heōs* an with the subjunctive, a construction that means that the coming of the Lord is certain, but the time is unknown. The Lord's judgment will be perfect, for he will bring to light what is hidden in darkness. Quite often in the New Testament darkness has an ethical significance and Paul may thus be referring to evil deeds. But here it seems better to take it of all those deeds which in this present darkness are kept hidden. The motives of men's hearts ('the most inward intentions of the inner life', G. Schrenk, TDNT, i, p. 635) are the secret desires and drives, good and bad alike. Only the Lord's judgment can take account of these secret things (cf. Rom. 2:16), and this is the judgment that counts. Anyone who is praised then has praise from God, the only praise that matters. Conzelmann sees this praise as 'a question of reward, not of merit' and notes that the word is used by magistrates. *From* (apo) denotes the source and thus the finality of the judgment. It comes from God. There can be no appeal against it.

3. Learn from Paul and Apollos (4:6–7)

Paul has been speaking about the function of ministers, more particularly of himself and Apollos. It might be thought that he was addressing his remarks primarily to such preachers, laying down how they should think of themselves and their work. But this is not so. His concern has been to teach the Corinthians and he proceeds to make this clear.

6. This use of the verb translated applied (*meteschēmatisa*) is unique. The word means 'to change the form of', 'to transform' (Phil. 3:21); it may be used of disguising oneself (2 Cor. 11:13–15). Here the meaning appears to be that Paul has done something like use a figure of speech (the noun *schēma* is often used of a rhetorical figure): 'I have given this teaching of mine the form of an exposition concerning Apollos and myself (BAGD cf. Phillips, 'I have used myself and

Apollos above as an illustration'). Paul's concern for the Corinthians comes out in the affectionate address, brothers, and the affirmation that what he has done is for your benefit.

Paul amplifies this with a statement of his purpose, though unfortunately what he says is not clear to us (Conzelmann says that the Greek is 'unintelligible' and Héring and others delete it). niv reads smoothly, but it has inserted the verb go which is absent from the text. Paul is saying something like 'that you may learn in us the "not beyond what is written" '. The article points to the following words as a well-known saying, possibly one used by the Corinthians or by Paul when he was at Corinth. Either way, it was a catch-cry familiar to both Paul and his readers. 'What is written' employs the formula Paul generally uses when quoting holy Scripture. The problem is that there is no passage in the Old Testament that runs exactly like this. Accordingly some have suggested a reference to some other writing. On the basis of the papyri Parry argues for the sense, ' "not to go beyond the terms," i.e. of the commission as teacher'; cf. gnb, 'Observe the proper rules'. This is possible, but it is more likely that Paul is referring to Scripture, even though he does not cite a particular passage. M. D. Hooker thinks he is referring to the quotations he has just made (3:19–20); the Corinthians, by adding 'their philosophy and rhetoric' to the simple gospel, were going beyond 'what is written' (NTS, x, 1963–64, pp. 127–132). Paul is saying that, by considering what he has said about Apollos and himself, they will learn the scriptural idea of the subordination of man. Uniformly the Bible elevates God. The Corinthian emphasis on the teachers meant that they were thinking too highly of men. Paul does not want them to take pride in one man over against another. There is a sense in which Christians may legitimately rejoice in the leadership given by their spiritual men. But when they find themselves so much in favour of one leader that they are against another they have overstepped the bounds. This is the evil of partisanship. The verb take pride (physioō, 'to be puffed up') occurs six times in this letter (again in 4:18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4), once in Colossians, and nowhere else in the New Testament. Evidently Paul regarded it as particularly appropriate in the case of the Corinthians. They, more than others, were addicted to the sin of pride. What is party spirit other than oneself writ large?

7. Paul's you is in the singular; he is addressing his remarks to an imaginary Corinthian who has become 'puffed up'. The verb makes ... different (diakrinei) means first, 'to put a difference between', and then, 'to regard as superior'. It is probably the latter use here (cf. Robertson and Plummer). The rhetorical question is followed by a second which reminds them that they have no native endowment that they did not receive from God, and this by a third which points to the stupidity of boasting about what is, after all, a gift given by God and in no sense a personal achievement. It is the point made in the rejection of worldly wisdom all over again. By the standards of the world the Corinthians may have had something to boast about. But Christians do

not accept the standards of the world. They realize that in themselves they are nothing. They owe everything to the grace of God. There is no place at all for such worldly activities as boasting.

4. The trials endured by the apostles (4:8–13)

Paul turns from his explanation of principles to show something of the lowliness of the apostles as seen in the many trials they had to endure. He does this in the form of a contrast between their wretched lot and the comparative ease of the Corinthians. The result is an impassioned and incisive piece of prose, with irony so biting that some have felt that Paul can scarcely be addressing the church as a whole. They point out that there is nothing like it elsewhere in the entire letter and suggest that here he has in mind the leaders only. But this is a precarious inference. There is no indication at all that Paul is addressing a different audience here. The whole church would hear the letter read, and, in the absence of some mark of a change of addressees, would take it as meant for them all.

8. You have all you want (*kekoresmenoi este*) translates a verb that is used properly of food (e.g. Acts 27:38). It denotes satiation (*lb*, ‘you already have all the spiritual food you need’), a feeling of satisfaction. In contrast to those on whom Jesus pronounces a blessing (‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness’, Matt. 5:6), the Corinthians felt no lack. The next two verbs, you have become rich and you have become kings both indicate that the Corinthians felt themselves secure and in want of nothing, a dangerous state (cf. Rev. 3:17; contrast Rom. 8:17). Moffatt appositely cites the Stoic catch-cry (taught by Diogenes): ‘I alone am rich, I alone reign as king’; cf. also Philo, ‘the kingdom of the Sage comes by the gift of God’ (On Abraham, 261). Far from the Corinthians having progressed in the Christian faith, they were approximating to the Stoic ideal of self-sufficiency. Some take *without us* to mean ‘without our help’, but in view of the second part of the verse it means rather ‘without our company’. The Corinthians thought that they had attained a position to which neither Paul nor the other apostles dared lay claim. Paul expresses the wish that they really were in the royal position they imagined. Then perhaps he and his associates might be linked with them in this splendour! The construction Paul employs implies that the wish has not been fulfilled: ‘Would that you did reign (though in fact you do not)’ is the sense of it.

9. This brings us to the actual plight of the apostles. Paul thinks of God as having set them where they were. He is not railing at some cross fate, but calmly accepting what God has done. The repeated references to the present (down to v. 13) shed light on the hardships Paul had to endure at Ephesus (cf. 16:8; Acts 19:23ff.). The verb *has put* (*apedeixen*) conveys the thought that it is owing to divine action that they are in the place where they are; God has appointed them to this position. The imagery is derived from the arena, as Moffatt’s rendering brings out, ‘God means us apostles to come in at the very end, like doomed gladiators in the arena!’ *Epithanatiou*, condemned to die, is a rare word, and apparently refers to condemned criminals who were often

paraded before the public gaze as objects of derision. They are a spectacle (theatron means 'theatre', and thus 'what one sees at a theatre'). The apostles are exhibited on a vast stage, for they are a spectacle to the whole universe (kosmos), to angels as well as to men (for the angels as spectators of human happenings cf. 11:10; John 1:51; 1 Tim. 3:16; 5:21; 1 Pet. 1:12, etc.). The combination angels and men embraces the totality of personal existence.

10. Paul steadily brings out what is involved in being made a public spectacle. His first point is that the apostles are fools for Christ. Once again he directs attention to the incompatibility between what the world counts as wisdom and what Christians esteem. Paul has referred to this more than once, but this time he introduces a startling contrast by asserting that the Corinthians are so wise in Christ! His word for wise (phronimos) is different from that used hitherto in this letter (sophos). There is no great difference in meaning (Conzelmann speaks of 'rhetorical variation'), though it is possible that by using a different word he puts some difference between his readers and the worldly-wise he has castigated earlier. But it is also possible that he is hinting that 'this Church is on dangerously good terms with the world' (Findlay). He means not that the Corinthians were actually wise, but that they claimed treasures of wisdom which Paul could not claim for himself. Similarly they held themselves to be strong and honoured (endoxoi, 'eminent', 'glorious'), whereas Paul knew himself to be weak (2:3; cf. 2 Cor. 10:10; 12:10), and dishonoured (cf. 2 Cor. 11:24–25; his word is atimos, 'without honour', sometimes used of those deprived of citizenship).

11. Paul now drops comparisons and concentrates on the hardships suffered by the apostles. He is not thinking of the distant past, but of what happens to this very hour. The apostles lacked food (which is in sharp contrast to 'you have all you want' in v. 8), drink, and clothing. They were brutally treated, where Paul's word (kolaphizō) is that used of the ill-treatment accorded Jesus (Matt. 26:67). K. L. Schmidt sees it as indicating insult as well as maltreatment (TDNT, iii, p. 819 n. 5.).

12. On several occasions Paul refers to the fact that he earned his own living (e.g. 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8; cf. 1 Thess. 4:11). This is all the more significant in that the Greeks despised all manual labour, thinking of it as fit only for slaves. He is referring to really hard work; his verb indicates labour to the point of weariness. In the middle of this verse Paul changes his construction and turns attention to the reaction of the apostles to the hardships they experienced. They are cursed (another word used about Christ, 1 Pet. 2:23), but their response is we bless (cf. Matt. 5:38–45; Luke 6:27–36, especially v. 28). They are persecuted, but simply endure it.

13. When they are slandered they answer kindly. Such conduct did not commend itself to the Greeks, for whom it was evidence of pusillanimity, a lack of proper manliness. Throughout this whole passage Paul emphasizes the contradiction between the values of the Christian and the worldly-wise Greek. He reaches his climax with two very expressive terms, translated scum and

refuse. The former, the plural perikatharmata means ‘things removed as the result of cleaning all round’. It is the refuse after a thorough cleaning, the filth that is thrown out. It does not differ greatly from refuse, peripsēma, which is simply a little more precise. It is ‘that which is wiped off by rubbing all round’. Because the removal of filth has the effect of cleansing, both words came to have the derived meaning of ‘propitiatory offering’, that offering that cleanses from sin. It was not used of sacrifices in general, but of human sacrifices which were offered in some places. We might think this would give the words a noble tinge, but not so. The people who were sacrificed were those who could most easily be spared, the meanest and most worthless in the community. On perikatharma F. Hauck says three strands meet, ‘the expiatory offering, that which is contemptible, and that which is to be thrown out’ (TDNT, iii, p. 431), while G. Stählin finds that peripsēma among other things suggests that they ‘were poor and useless people ... who threw away their own lives ... in a ridiculous way’ (TDNT, vi, p. 90). Paul’s point then is that the apostles were regarded as the most contemptible of people (cf. Lam. 3:45). Up to this moment (which comes last in the Greek) once more brings out the point that his sufferings were not past history. He was describing the present position of the apostles. The Corinthians might claim a splendid place, but Paul was under no illusion about the place reserved for such as him in this world.

G. A personal appeal (4:14–21)

There is a marked change of mood at this point, but we should bear in mind that Paul’s letters are real letters, not systematic theological treatises. Real letters not infrequently contain abrupt changes of tone and mood like this one.

14. Paul’s sternness gives way to tenderness. What he has said might be understood as an attempt to make the Corinthians feel shame. On occasion Paul can intend to do just that (6:5; 15:34), but not here. He has the warmest of feelings for his dear children, and his purpose is simply to warn them. His verb (noutheteō) does indeed convey the thought of blame for wrongdoing (it is often translated ‘admonish’), but it is criticism in love that is meant as this verse shows plainly. The cognate noun is used of the duty of a father to his children (Eph. 6:4).

15. We see Paul’s affection in his reference to the unique tie between him and the Corinthians. They may have ten thousand guardians, but not one of them is a father to them, and it is that that Paul became through the gospel. It is not easy to translate paidagōgous (niv, guardians), for in our community we do not have the equivalent. The word referred to a slave who had special responsibility for a boy. ‘The paidagōgos was the personal attendant who accompanied the boy, took him to school and home again, heard him recite his “lines”, taught him good manners and generally looked after him; he was entitled to respect and normally received it’ (Bruce). Clearly he was important, but Craig reminds us that he could be a quite worthless slave and that he could be replaced. There was a great difference between him and the father. By virtue of his activity in

founding the church at Corinth Paul stood in the relation of a father in Christ to the believers (cf. 9:2; Philem. 10). This makes two things clear. The one is that his affection for them was, in the nature of things, great (cf. Chrysostom, 'He is not here setting forth his dignity, but the exceeding greatness of his love'). The other is that, no matter how much they had profited from the ministry of others, they owed most of all to Paul; they should therefore heed his injunctions.

16. Thus he can appeal to them to imitate him (cf. 11:1; Gal. 4:12; Phil. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:7, 9). He does not wish to attach his followers to himself personally; that would be in contradiction of the whole tenor of this passage. He wants them to imitate him only so that they may in this way learn to imitate Christ (cf. 11:1; 1 Thess. 1:6). While in the different circumstances of today preachers may well hesitate to call on others to imitate them, it still remains that if we are to commend our gospel it must be because our lives reveal its power.

17. Not much is known about Timothy's visit to Corinth (see Introduction, p. 27). Clearly Paul felt that trouble was beginning and he sent Timothy to clear it up. niv takes the aorist as epistolary, I am sending, but most see it as the past tense; Paul had already sent him. This is supported by the fact that Timothy is not included in the greetings at the beginning of this letter (contrast 2 Cor. 1:1; cf. 1 Thess. 3:2). He was sent to remind the Corinthians of Paul's 'ways (niv, way of life) in Christ Jesus'. Once more appeal is made to Paul's example; the term 'ways' probably reflects his Jewish background, for it 'seldom has a moral significance in Greek' (Barrett), whereas the Jews made much of it in the rabbinical concept of halakah (rule based on Scripture). Paul makes the further point that he was not making exceptional demands on the Corinthians, but that which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church (cf. 7:17; 11:16; 14:33, 36). He had said and done the same kind of thing at Corinth as elsewhere, and he looked for the same kind of behaviour there as elsewhere in the church.

18. Some had become arrogant (see note on 'puffed up', v. 6). They had evidently asserted confidently that Paul would not visit their city again. They would have pointed out that it was Timothy, not Paul, who was to visit them. They would say that Paul did not dare to face them; the Corinthians then had nothing to gain from adherence to Paul, and nothing to fear from opposing him.

19. Paul assures them that such assumptions are erroneous. He will come very soon, subject always to the proviso if the Lord is willing (cf. 16:7 and the note there). He is not a free agent. He is subject to the Lord's direction and recognizes that the Lord may not open up the way for him to go to Corinth at this time. But his point is that it is only divine restraint of this kind that will stop him. There is a characteristic Pauline differentiation between words and deeds (2:4, 13; 1 Thess. 1:5; cf. Rom. 1:16). His opponents at Corinth may be good talkers, but can they show power? The gospel does not simply tell people what they ought to do; in it God gives them power to do it. It does not matter whether Paul's opponents can speak well, but it does matter

whether the power of God is manifest in them, ‘that spiritual efficacy, with which those are endowed who dispense the word of the Lord with earnestness’ (Calvin).

20. The kingdom of God is the most frequent topic in the teaching of Jesus. It is not so prominent in the rest of the New Testament, but Paul speaks of it several times in this epistle (6:9–10; 15:24, 50). The kingdom involves divine power, as in the casting out of devils (Luke 11:20), and it is power that is emphasized here. God’s kingdom is not simply good advice; it is more than a matter of talk, ‘for how small an affair is it for any one to have skill to prate eloquently, while he has nothing but empty tinkling’ (Calvin). People know what they ought to do. The trouble is that, knowing the good, they do the evil. They need God’s power to enable them to live as befits his kingdom. There is probably an intentional contrast with the claims of the Corinthians (v. 8). Here is true royalty.

21. The question is not whether Paul will come, but how he will come. He puts the issue squarely before them. He could come with a whip, i.e. in sternness, ready to chastise and rebuke. Or, he could come in love and with a gentle spirit. But this assumes that they are ready to receive him as such. The choice rests with the people of Corinth.

Morris, L. (1985). *1 Corinthians: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 7, pp. 41–85). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.