

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
NEW YORK SCHOOL

FINAL THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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TITLE: Factionalism in 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Against the Backdrop of Jewish
Sectarianism in the First Century CE and Later Rabbinic Judaism

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**Factionalism in First and Second Corinthians,
Against the Backdrop of Jewish Sectarianism in the First Century CE
and Later Rabbinic Judaism**

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

**Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinic Program
New York, New York**

May 2007

Dr. Martin Cohen

*This thesis is dedicated to my family; my wife Ruth and
my children Gabriel and Sarah, without whom I could not have
realized my dream of becoming a rabbi.
I would also like to dedicate it to my teacher Rabbi Martin A. Cohen.*

Thesis Summary

This thesis consists of six chapters which include the introduction and the conclusion. The contribution of this thesis is to give a sense of the fractured world that existed in the first century CE. This fracturing, caused in part by Roman oppression, led to the various sects that gave rise to present day Judaism and Christianity. The goal of the paper is to show how the sectarianism in one of the cities, Corinth affected later Christianity. These same stresses were affecting the Jewish communities of the time both in *Eretz Yisrael* and in the Diaspora. The myth of unity for both the church and synagogue has arisen over the centuries and this only serves to hide the reality of sectarianism and factionalism.

The thesis first assesses the situation in Corinth and tries to establish why Paul wanted to establish a church. Through the two epistles to the Corinthians, we look at the various rhetorical tools that Paul uses to keep his power base unified and through the language that he uses, speculate on just who are his opponents in Corinth. There is a breakdown of his epistles and a highlighting of citations that clearly reflect factionalism. Finally there is a discussion regarding the Jewish world and how that world was also fractured, the leading rabbis of the times and how their disputes are reflected in the Talmud.

Many books regarding the Christian Bible were used; extensive use of Martin Cohen's *Two Sister Faiths*, several citations from the Mishnah and the Bavli were translated in order to analyze the real political intent hidden within a particular *mahloket*.

Introduction

In attending Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) I have come to think in completely new ways and with a new vocabulary. Looking at the Torah and Bible from the point of view of a congregant, one tends to seek simpler answers to their questions. Regardless of whether or not one understands the meaning behind *pshat* or *remez*, Rashi's thoughts or Rambam's philosophy; one begins study by reading someone else's translation of the text and then begins to question their rabbi or teacher. If one is lucky enough to have a teacher who can help them navigate some of the nuances of text, then you get a chance to look a little bit below the surface. It was only when I arrived at HUC-JIR and began studying with various professors that new and more perceptive insights opened up for me.

One of these insights leads us on a socio-political path in looking at our sacred texts. This means that we try to look at the information in our texts from a much more dispassionate view; a view that is not necessarily religion centered, but asks the question: what is the text telling us about what is going on in that society at that time? There are few if any primary records from the period of the Bible and soon after; and history was documented differently than it is today. As Martin Cohen points out in *Two Sister Faiths*, "All our historical sources are connected with institutions. Even insignificant personal scraps reflect surrounding institutions, while influential sources, regardless of the privacy of their origins, reveal deliberate institutional stamps."¹ In other words, the people who wrote the history did it in a specific way and wanted to tell the story the way they wanted it remembered.

¹ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 4.

In attempting to decipher what is happening in a historical period, we are often left with little direct information and we have to derive a hypothesis using pieces of information from disparate places. As Martin Cohen points out regarding our study of history and the problems with the evidence that remains with us:

The first are the ravages of transmission: Our evidence of past is never complete; it is largely nothing more than a chance encounter. The second is the reality of power: Our evidence mainly derives from victorious groups and their nearly victorious rivals. The third is the reticence of dominance: Our evidence reflects not only the expressed bias of stronger groups, but their penchant for the exclusion of embarrassing data.²

Nevertheless, we can still infer information from the shards of evidence left to us and piece together a certain view of history. This view may not be the "facts" as a newspaper would write them today; however, it may give us a view that the writers had not intended for us to have.

In addition to looking at our texts through different insights, we are taught a new vocabulary in which to understand the world and the evidence provided. The first of the new vocabulary is the "world-view"³ of a society and those within the society. People in a society try to understand their world from a particular perspective. It must make sense to them through the eyes that they are looking at the world. In *Two Sister Faiths*, Martin Cohen points out: "the world view comprehends life from an ongoing blend of experience and fantasy."⁴ There can be many factions in a local political spectrum with a

² M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 4

³ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 5

⁴ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 5

society, but if their world-view is similar, they can live in peace. There needs to be "enforceable norms"⁵ whether through a formalized constitution or not.

Every society has a "spectrum"⁶ of groups that are vying for power and influence within that society. The group that is in power at any one specific time is called the tonal group and at each point in the spectrum there are sub-groups that are seeking influence within or near that point of the spectrum. Since there are so many groups within a spectrum, we can say that a society is always "factionalized."⁷ "Every societal organism, its sub-groups included, is constantly pursuing an elusive homeostasis, or equilibrium."⁸ These thoughts together mean that societies are always in a state of flux, to one degree or another. The more internal or external pressure that is put on a society, the more likely the spectrum of that society will be activated and therefore the more likely there is a chance for change.

Within the spectrum of society there are also groups and sub-groups. "All subgroups share the general society's needs, structures and world-views. All therefore resemble one another."⁹ Why is it important to recognize that these sub-groups are not so far from each other? Most sub-groups want the same things for their constituents, but ultimately the leaders of the sub-groups want to be the power of the entire spectrum. Martin Cohen points out that: "the greater the similarity among the sub-groups, the greater the ferocity of their mutual opposition."¹⁰ Therefore, the groups that are closest to each other would fight the hardest against each other. This makes sense when we look at

⁵ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 5

⁶ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 5

⁷ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 5

⁸ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 5

⁹ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 6

¹⁰ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 6

it from the point of view of gaining power. When attempting to amass power, the groups that are closest to you in beliefs will be fertile ground for gaining new adherents to your philosophy. If you can defeat their leaders than you will likely inherit their followers.

Each group and sub-group is divided into "two diverse orientations, those of the leadership and those of the led."¹¹ The individuals in each of these groups are not static but are dynamic and ever changing. Any one person can be in a leadership role in one situation and a follower in another. Cohen calls these groups the high cultural tradition (hct) for the leadership; and the low cultural tradition (lct) for those being led. In their specific roles, "hct acts primarily cerebrally and cognitively, and lct acts viscerally and affectively."¹² As we get further into this discussion, we will see that in 1 Corinthians, the people of Corinth seem to divide themselves into factions that are identifiable with their various leaders.

Martin Cohen contends that societies are always factionalized; but as we shall see, the period from at least 165 BCE until Paul wrote the letter to the Corinthians (circa 51 CE) was a period of extreme factionalism and heightened spectrum activation.¹³ The year 165 BCE was chosen as a beginning point to illustrate the factionalism of the era caused by the Hasmonean war on Antiochus Epiphanies. Although, there was factionalism and turmoil prior to this time in both Judea and the entire Middle Eastern area; a cutoff needs to be chosen and the Hasmonean War had a profound effect on this period of history.

¹¹ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 6.

¹² M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 6

¹³ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 10.

From the time that Mattathias, the Priest and head of the Maccabees, refused Antiochus' demand for a sacrifice¹⁴ and then slew the Priest who agreed to do the sacrifice, there were few periods of civil peace for at least the next two hundred years. When the Hasmoneans took power, new Priests loyal to them were named and a new government was established.¹⁵ Many of the ousted priests and those with a more conservative political outlook realized that they would fare better if they returned to Seleucid rule; therefore what amounted to civil war took place over at least a decade of time.¹⁶ In short, the Jewish establishment was supported by Seleucid power and the other factions were viewed as revolutionaries and heretics. As Martin Cohen points out, as the Seleucids had to attend to other uprisings in their realm, the revolutionary activity of the opposition forces in Judea would increase its fervor.¹⁷

When the Seleucids and their representatives in Judea abrogated the Torah/Constitution,¹⁸ most of the opposing factions in the Jewish spectrum were activated and united against the ruling party.¹⁹ By 164 BCE, the Maccabean fighters won several victories against the Seleucids and had occupied the Temple Mount.²⁰ After their victory, Judah Maccabee and his followers were able to consolidate their victory even at the expense of other Jewish lives.²¹

¹⁴ Josephus. *The Antiquities of the Jews*, p. 325

¹⁵ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 13.

¹⁶ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 12

¹⁷ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 12

¹⁸ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 12

¹⁹ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 12

²⁰ R. Seltzer. *Jewish People Jewish Thought*, p. 158

²¹ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 13.

If we take a closer look at the Hasmonean Revolution,²² we can see that this civil war can be considered a battle between the Hellenists and the anti-Hellenists. Contrary to today's popular myth, there were many who did not side with the Maccabees but with the Hellenists and it was not just an aristocracy that fought with the Seleucids, otherwise it would have been a very short lived civil war.²³ In order for the Hellenists to have sufficient support, they might have publicly supported the Greek way of living, but they must have been able to somehow weave it into compatibility with the Torah.²⁴

Over the course of the next decade or so, other Jewish factions, believing that they would fare better under the Seleucids, fought the Maccabees in a counter-revolution.²⁵ Although the Seleucids promised the end of religious persecutions, the back and forth of civil war continued. At one point, the Hellenists were able to regain power and the Seleucids allowed them to at least make the appearance that the Torah was again the constitution.²⁶ As Martin Cohen points out, if the conditions returned to what they were prior to the abrogation of the Torah, why did Judah Maccabee and his fighters continue fighting after the peace accords?²⁷ Cohen postulates that it was motivated by politics as rather than religion.²⁸ Perhaps after years of fighting, Judah Maccabee could no longer settle for the old status quo.

²² M. Cohen. *The Hasmonean Revolution Politically Considered*, p. 13

²³ M. Cohen. *The Hasmonean Revolution Politically Considered*, p. 17

²⁴ M. Cohen. *The Hasmonean Revolution Politically Considered*, p. 19

²⁵ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 13

²⁶ M. Cohen. *The Hasmonean Revolution, Politically Considered*, p. 21

²⁷ M. Cohen. *The Hasmonean Revolution, Politically Considered*, p. 21

²⁸ M. Cohen. *The Hasmonean Revolution, Politically Considered*, p. 21

Finally, in 152, the Hasmoneans were able to assume a firm grip on authority and name their own high priest, Jonathan Apphus.²⁹ The new Hasmonean dynasty was a continuation and a transformation of the previous leadership system. It was still a theocracy, as they had named their own Priest; however, the Hasmoneans were also commanders of the Judean army and were the recognized Ethnarchs or political leaders of the country.³⁰ The importance of Jews openly fighting other Jews for power should not be lost or minimized. As Martin Cohen points out that there is always factionalism in any society, most of the time it is done peacefully. Generally it is when the spectrum is activated and in crises will there be open warfare. Perhaps the whole Hasmonean revolution and the continued strife in the aftermath is better explained in political rather than a religious context. It makes more sense if we view this as a pattern of constant tension between the leadership authority and opposition groups than trying to understand the situation in a Hellenist/anti-Hellenist prism.³¹

The next several decades continue to see unrest that is clearly indicative of an activated spectrum. Around 140 BCE, Jonathan Apphus, the High Priest is assassinated and his brother Simon assumes the position of High Priest.³² Simon is murdered just 7 years later and is succeeded by his son, John Hyrcanus.³³ Hyrcanus rules until 104 BCE when he is succeeded by his son Aristobolus who only reigned for one year and then his second son, Alexander Janneus who reigned from 103 BCE – until 76BCE. Salome Alexandra ruled from 76-67 BCE followed by her sons until 63BCE. It was at this time

²⁹ *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 13

³⁰ R. Seltzer. *Jewish People Jewish Thought*, p. 180

³¹ M. Cohen. *The Hasmonean Revolution Politically Considered*, p. 23

³² R. Seltzer. *Jewish People Jewish Thought*, p. 166

³³ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 14

that Rome stepped into the situation. Both of Alexandra's children were asked to present their case for ruling to Pompey, who was Rome's representative in Judea. Pompey chose Hyrcanus as the High Priest, but not as king.³⁴ While it may seem that there was stability during at least two of the rulers (Hyrcanus and Janneus), there was civil war that continued through much of this time.³⁵

In Antiquities of the Jews, Josephus tells us that there were three sects of Jews at this time, Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenes.³⁶ The civil war was generally between two of these groups, the Sadducees and the Pharisees.³⁷ Josephus tells us that the civil war was precipitated by the transfer of allegiance of John Hyrcanus from the Sadducees to the Pharisees.³⁸ At this point the Sadducees kept their "ceremonial" responsibilities and their wealth but the Pharisees were granted effective control over Jewish life.³⁹ From different sources we are able to deduce that this conflict defined life in Judea until the fall of the Temple in 70 CE. At that point, with the destruction of the Temple, there was really no reason for being for the Sadducees.

According to Josephus:

the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the Law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the traditions of our forefathers; and concerning these things, it is that great disputes and differences have arisen among them, while the Sadducees are able to persuade but the rich, and

³⁴ R. Seltzer. *Jewish People Jewish Thought*, p. 182

³⁵ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 14

³⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 13, Chapter 6, v. 171

³⁷ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 16

³⁸ Josephus. *Ibid*, Book 13, Chapter 10, v. 275

³⁹ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 14

have not the populace obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the multitude of their side.⁴⁰

From Josephus' remarks we can glean several issues. The first of these issues is that the Pharisees are no longer tied to the Torah. He suggests that for the first time, *minhag ha-makom*, or the customs of the place were observed by the Pharisees. As Josephus states that certain observances were from their forefathers. The second issue appears to be that the Sadducees only have support from the very wealthy while the Pharisees have the multitude on their side. While the Sadducees' power base may very well have been with the rich, the question must be asked, if the Sadducees message only resonated with the very wealthy, how were they able to sustain a civil war that lasted close to 200 years?⁴¹

Josephus calls both the Sadducees and Pharisees sects; and while we understand sects to be religious cults, Martin Cohen has a very different take on them. "The Sadducees and the Pharisees were political parties with conflicting constitutional concerns."⁴² He continues: the Sadducees were conservative in their approach to the Torah; the Pharisees were liberal and innovative.⁴³ What we are seeing is the beginning of a long history of conflict between at least these two groups and the Jewish people writ large. Josephus also named at least one other sect, the Essenes, and while we have little evidence to support the notion that there were other large sects (or political parties), one can only speculate that these were not the only three parties representing the people of Judea.

⁴⁰ Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 13, Chapter 10, vs. 297-298

⁴¹ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 15

⁴² M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 15

⁴³ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 15

Under the Pharisees, there was a wholesale change from the previous "constitution" or the Torah. There was a move away from the Temple as the center of religious life and a new judicial system.⁴⁴ Instead of the Priests making legal decisions, *batei-din* or courts were established to preside over legal issues.⁴⁵ These courts would have three judges presiding, none of which had to be from the priesthood. At the very head of this judicial system was the *Beit Din HaGadol*, or the Great Court.⁴⁶ The Great Court had a series of five pairs of leaders or *zugot*. The leader of the majority party was sometimes called *Nasi* or Prince and the leader of the minority was sometimes referred to as the *Av Bet Din* or Father of the Court.⁴⁷ It is less important to know that when these *zugot* presided over the *Beit Din HaGadol* as it was to note that there were political parties and dissension amongst the leaders during this time.

There was the beginning of a move away from the agrarian society, or at least the governmental structures that supported the agrarian society to a much more tonally urban organization.⁴⁸ The Torah as a constitution functioned well in an agrarian setting with the Temple as the center of life. As the Pharisees gained control and the Sadducees lost power, the center of life in Judea slowly moved to the synagogue. There was also a need to have a new or different constitution. Concurrent with the change of venue of religious life, came a change from the Torah to "oral law".⁴⁹ Previously, the law was considered divinely ordered, but in this time, there was a movement away from divine laws to *halakha* or laws. These changes point to an urban tonality although the greater society

⁴⁴ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 16

⁴⁵ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 16

⁴⁶ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 16

⁴⁷ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 16

⁴⁸ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 16

⁴⁹ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 17

was still majority agrarian.⁵⁰ Changes in any society are difficult at best and the changes that the Pharisees were implementing had to be extremely hard for the majority to accept. It is small wonder that there was strife between the various sects over a very long period of time.

As Rome consolidated its control in the area, they had hoped that there would be a single group that would rule and provide the stability that Rome liked its conquered areas to display. This was hardly the case in Judea and in fact as Rome increased its repression of the people, more and more people joined in rebellion. Martin Cohen points out:

The oppression felt by Jews during this time is nowhere better exemplified than in their mounting tax burden. For the early part of the first century CE the total tax burden, for internal government as well as for Rome, has been conservatively estimated at thirty to forty per cent of income. Later the sums were capriciously increased by procurators like Albinus.⁵¹

Through much of the Roman times, it is clear that the Pharisaic world view prevailed and many of the other groups were forced to follow what the Pharisees were implementing. However, as we often see within a group when their external enemies are subdued, there began an increase in the factionalism with the Pharisees.⁵²

During the late 1st century BCE and the early part of the 1st century CE at least five major sects of political groups emerged. As previously discussed, the Pharisees became the tonal group as they were backed by Rome. In trying to reconstruct the Pharisaic spectrum, the proto-rabbis as exemplified by *Beit Hillel* would have been the

⁵⁰ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 18

⁵¹ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 20

⁵² M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 20

Pharisaic tonal voice.⁵³ To the left of the proto-rabbis would have been the universalists and messianic pacifistic groups. It is highly likely that Jesus arose from this wing of the Pharisaic spectrum.⁵⁴ To the right of the proto-rabbis would have been a more militant messianic and conservative element, desiring a return to Jerusalem, after 70CE and would have been exemplified by *Beit Shammai*.

The second political party would have been the already discussed Sadducees. Though the Sadducees were now out of power, the internal tonal element would have been espousing a move back to Torah as constitution with the sacrificial cult as their primary form of community leadership. The left side of this spectrum would have still desired sacrifice but with a possible attempt to incorporate some of the *halakha* that the proto-rabbis had promulgated. The right side of this spectrum would have wanted to continue and escalate their civil war with the Pharisees and quite likely even fight the Romans directly.

Another political group (though group is probably a misnomer as they were hardly organized) that was previously mentioned by Josephus was the Essenes. Josephus mentions them as early as the time of the Hasmoneans.⁵⁵ Josephus even claims to have been a direct observer of the Essenes.⁵⁶ It is important to remember that the Essenes would best be described as a type and not some sort of monolithic block. Since they were never an organized group, it would have been impossible for them to ever truly gain political power as there was no central, tonal element. They were an ascetic, anti-

⁵³ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 16

⁵⁴ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 16

⁵⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 13, Chapter 6, v. 171

⁵⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 13, Chapter 6, v. 171

establishment group who none the less lived within society, at least many of them did.⁵⁷

The internal tonal group of the Essenes would have had the following characteristics: ascetic, possibly celibate, messianic and apocalyptic. To the left the group may have lived in towns and probably would have married. To the right the group would have completely separated themselves from society (possibly Qumran) and believed in two messiahs, one as a king and one as a priest. It is possible that the most important of the Essenes was John the Baptist who had so many followers and so threatened King Herod Antipas that the king felt that he had to have John beheaded.⁵⁸

The other political groups we have very little information on, but we do know that they existed.⁵⁹ The zealots arose from the overall militant wing of the spectrum.⁶⁰ The zealots should not be grouped together or assumed to be part of a single organization.⁶¹ By the very definition of zealot, they would not be interested in forming an overall organization. Much like the Essenes, they are better characterized as a type or a party within the overall political spectrum.⁶² We have very little information regarding their structure beyond what Josephus tells us. They seemed to be grouped by their leader. For instance, the Fourth Philosophy was intimately tied to Judah the Galilean.⁶³ A group of zealots was called the Sicarii and they are tied to Eleazar ben Jair.⁶⁴ As an aside, Josephus tells us that it was the Sicarii who made their last stand at Masada.

⁵⁷ M. Cohen, *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 23

⁵⁸ M. Cohen, *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 24

⁵⁹ M. Cohen, *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 24

⁶⁰ M. Cohen, *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 22

⁶¹ M. Cohen, *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 22

⁶² M. Cohen, *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 22

⁶³ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18:1:6

⁶⁴ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 2:13:3

All of these different groups' sub-groups and projected wings of the various spectra suggest that during this time period the overall political spectrum was very much activated. Rome was pushing hard to repress society which was having the exact opposite effect and was increasing the activism, especially on the fringes of the spectrum.⁶⁵ Rome, as an empire, had become overextended at this point. They were having troubles in other areas of their realm and also were changing leadership on a regular basis. To the Romans, Judea was not some central focus but more of an annoyance and all of the troubles that the Jews were causing was probably not worth their effort. Hence they continued to apply pressure to attempt to quiet the community. The severe conditions of the urban dwellers under the harsh taxation of the Romans only increased the desperation felt by the people.

The messianic movement of the first century CE may have culminated in a Jesus however, it was by no means limited to Jesus. The messianic movement probably arose within the liberal wing of the Pharisaic spectrum or the more militant messianic groups probably arose from the conservative wing of the Pharisees; but over time it developed its own spectrum. "The existence of various leaders of Jesus' general type is demonstrated by the various centrifugal groups whose movements are recorded."⁶⁶ While there probably was a historical Jesus; there were others who were of similar type. The fact that eventually there would be four canonized Gospels, with many uncanonized ones, reflects the diversity of groups within the nascent christian spectrum.

Sandmel points out that: "the spirit of ferment out of which the primitive christian church had begun to emerge and take form is reflected in the very nature and tone of

⁶⁵ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 25

⁶⁶ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 26

Paul's writings."⁶⁷ As we have seen in the Jewish world, the early Christians also had many different sects or parties. Paul, Peter, James (Jesus' brother), John son of Zebedee were just four of probably more leaders of early christian groups who exerted some forms of power.

Factionalism and dissension was a fact of life for the Jewish people of this time and place. It had been a fact of life in Judea since at least 165 BCE. It is small wonder that there was factionalism under other parts of the Roman Empire, especially when a sizable Jewish population lived in a particular place, such as in Corinth. The wonder is that in what would become the canonical literature, the authors had to include information that allows us to see that factionalism and dissension existed. While one group eventually became tonal (Paul) the other groups clearly had such strong influence that they could not be written completely out of the texts. In fact, one of the lessons that the early christian church seemed to learn from all the strife that the Jews had been subject to, was to try and repress other voices. As we will see in the two letters to the Corinthians, Paul was very vociferous against any other voice that may have arisen. As Paul's group gained tonal authority, they tried to ensure that their voice was not only the authority, but also the only one.

⁶⁷ S. Sandmel. *A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament*, p. 39

Chapter 1

First and Second Corinthians: Context and Content

Considering the backdrop of Roman society and the Hellenistic culture of the Middle East, it is hardly surprising that the society at Corinth was factionalized. Generally speaking, even in the best of times, as Martin Cohen points out in *Two Sister Faiths*, “all societies, large and small are dynamic organisms. None is at anytime monolithic. Every one is at all times factionalized.”⁶⁸ Every society, like any living organism is looking for homeostasis or equilibrium and any number of internal or external pressures can cause the society to factionalize to a greater or lesser degree.⁶⁹ The city of Corinth was considered the hub of east-west trade and was the center of Roman imperial culture in Greece.⁷⁰ The people of Corinth were exposed to many different thoughts, religions or denominations within a religion and ideas that made it fertile ground for increased factionalism and diversity of thought.

Corinth was a city strategically located on the Peloponnesus peninsula that had access to both the Aegean and the Adriatic seas. The original city of Corinth had been destroyed by the Romans in 146 BCE and was rebuilt as a colony in 44 BCE. It was originally settled by freemen and had become wealthy enough by the late first century BCE to sponsor Olympic “like” games.⁷¹ By the early first century CE, Corinth had a sizeable Jewish population along with other like minded social and political groups.⁷²

⁶⁸ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 5

⁶⁹ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 5

⁷⁰ M. Coogan, editor. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, p. 267

⁷¹ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p.798

⁷² J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p.798

There were temples established to the cult of the emperor, to the various Greek deities and to various Egyptian deities.⁷³ Corinth was a very cosmopolitan city and religious syncretism flourished.⁷⁴ There were many faiths and traditions and none seem to predominate.

It is possible or probable that the reason why Paul chose Corinth as his base was because there had been no established predominant tradition. The people of Corinth had come from a variety of other places and seemed to be open to the various ideas that the other groups brought with them. The city was barely one hundred years old and it must have been an inviting place for someone who wanted to plant the seed for his church. Before proceeding on, it must be understood that the term church should not be thought of as it is today. There was no "church" in the overarching sense meaning a universally accepted organization. There were also no churches, meaning buildings called churches as we know them today. In Paul's time, a church was a social, political, and economic entity that was as much about power as it was about anything else. People generally did not go to their temple to pray, but to sacrifice or ask their leader of the cult for some type of absolution. It was in this setting that Paul decided to establish his first urban mission.⁷⁵ Paul was not the only "preacher" to think of Corinth as an inviting place for his work. As we shall see in First Corinthians, Paul names three other people, including Cephas (Peter) and Apollos as people preaching in the city. Additionally, in Second Corinthians there is continued strife and "outsiders" who must think of Corinth in the inviting way that Paul did. They were coming to the city in an attempt to win followers

⁷³ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 798-9

⁷⁴ W. Kümmel. *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 271.

⁷⁵ M. Coogan, editor. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, p. 267

and gain power. Therefore, it is safe to say that Paul had quite a bit of competition and there was never any guarantee that his voice would win out over these other “preachers.”

Prior to the destruction of Corinth in 146 BCE, the city had a terrible reputation in terms of sexual immorality.⁷⁶ After the city was reborn under the Romans, it was probably no better or worse morally speaking, than any other Mediterranean city. However, Corinth continued to have much the same reputation as it had previously.⁷⁷ Whether it was because of this reputation or the lack of a religious tradition, Corinth, in Paul’s eyes, was a place ripe for his nascent teaching. In addition to the prime cultural reasons for beginning his urban church in Corinth, it was geographically a prime spot. There is a belief, at least at that time, that if you control the cities you can more easily control the countryside. In this case, so many different peoples and groups had to come through Corinth to buy or sell goods, reach ships to go to other lands or just needed a critical mass of people that Paul understood if you can influence the city, you can influence a much greater area.

Paul also understood that there was a lot of money in Corinth.⁷⁸ The reality of being an apostle and itinerant preacher is that you have to have sources of funding in order to live. Had Paul been able to find “employment” in *Eretz Yisrael* than he probably would not have made his journeys and come to the city of Corinth. If Paul was able to establish a strong base in Corinth, he would be able to have a continuous supply of money. While the very top and bottom of the Greco-Roman social scale may have been

⁷⁶ C.K. Barrett. *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 2.

⁷⁷ C.K. Barrett. *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 2.

⁷⁸ M. Coogan, editor. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, p. 275

absent from Corinth,⁷⁹ there were enough merchant class citizens to make Corinth a significantly wealthy city. In several passages in his two epistles, he actually seems to reject money from the Corinthians; however, it is difficult to say whether or not he was saying that only for effect. There certainly seemed to be a sense that some of the citizens of Corinth wanted to be his patron.

Paul first visited Corinth around the year 50 CE and probably spent around a year and a half there.⁸⁰ In Paul's traveling to Corinth his goal was to establish a viable church and following and this would then allow him to use the city as a jump off point to other communities in the area.⁸¹ After spending a year and a half there, he moved onto Ephesus, however, his attention would be brought back to Corinth any number of times. As we will see, while there are two epistles to Corinth canonized in the Christian Bible, scholars disagree on the exact number of epistles that he actually wrote. There is at least one scholar who claims the possibility that there were just these two letters in their entirety⁸² as compared to those who claim there were at least four or more fragments of different letters.⁸³ Regardless of the number of letters, Corinth was clearly an important community for Paul and the letters show us that there was quite a bit of factionalism and strife occurring in the city.

We learn from various sources that the first letter to the Corinthians was written sometime around 54 CE.⁸⁴ Other sources suggest that it could be as early as 53 CE⁸⁵ or

⁷⁹ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p.799

⁸⁰ A.H. Skeabeck, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 325

⁸¹ A.H. Skeabeck, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 325

⁸² W. Kümmel. *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 273...

⁸³ S. Sandmel. *A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament*, p. 84

⁸⁴ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p.799

⁸⁵ W. Kümmel. *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 273

as late as 55 CE.⁸⁶ Regardless of the year, it was written in the spring and in the city of Ephesus as Paul tells us this himself. There seems to be little argument that the authenticity of First Corinthians is undisputed at least in terms of Paul being the author.⁸⁷ It consists of the longest fully extant letter from the correspondence between Paul and the church at Corinth.⁸⁸ The letter has no consecutive development of ideas, but takes up different questions about life and faith of the Christian community.⁸⁹ It seems to be similar to a letter that the later Geonim might receive from the various Jewish communities, whereby the community asks several questions and the scholar attempts to answer them. When a leader is asked to clarify issues or when a community seeks a ruling from a leader for acts done in the community it shows clearly that Paul had quickly become an important voice in Corinth.

Due to the disjointedness of the letter, there is some thought that this epistle is composed of more than one fragment.⁹⁰ There appear to be several fragments of at least two letters, both coming from Paul. While we have a close to complete letter from Paul, the other letter that seems to appear as fragments in First Corinthians has never been found. There are those, like Kümmel who would argue that though the letter is hardly seamless, that does not mean that there was more than one letter.⁹¹ On the whole however, it appears that most of the scholars agree that there is more than one letter extant.

⁸⁶ *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 802

⁸⁷ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p.799 (amongst others)

⁸⁸ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1139

⁸⁹ W. Kümmel. *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 270

⁹⁰ A.H. Skeabeck, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 326

⁹¹ W. Kümmel. *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 271

In comparison to the other letters from Paul that are in the Christian Bible, these letters are unique in that they show a continuing correspondence between the community and Paul.⁹² From the series of letters and visits from Paul (he visited Corinth at least three times)⁹³ he considered the city and the church he founded there to be of utmost importance. Not only does he answer the questions regarding their moral issues, but he takes the time them to let the Corinthians know in no uncertain terms how concerned he is regarding their factionalism and strife. Paul is effected by what he sees and hears about the situation in Corinth. When it finally seems that the community has agreed to be unified under Paul, he is greatly relieved and very pleased.

First Corinthians was already known to the general early christian community as references to it appear in other epistles in the Christian Bible.⁹⁴ Various other writers of antiquity also knew about First Corinthians; these include Clement and Ignatius.⁹⁵ It is interesting, that the second epistle to the Corinthians is not known to a wider audience until significant time has passed. There could be several reasons for this, including the hypothesis that while First Corinthians, except for a minor fragment was almost wholly one letter, Second Corinthians consisted of anywhere between two and possibly six different letters. Therefore, it took time for Second Corinthians to be pieced together and then to makes its appearance in the early christian world.

While the epistle is obviously being sent to the Corinthians and not intended for others, there is a supplement added that says "with all who call upon the Lord Jesus in

⁹² *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1139

⁹³ W. Kümmel. *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 271

⁹⁴ W. Kümmel. *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 275

⁹⁵ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1140

every place, theirs and ours.”⁹⁶ (1 Cor 1:26 and 14:33) It is quite possible and probable that this line was added at some later point when the epistle became “public” knowledge. On the other hand, Kümmel points out that it is also possible that Paul understood that at some point this letter would reach a far greater audience,⁹⁷ though Kümmel seems to take this idea to a further extent than do the other scholars. How aware Paul may have been about his possible place in the future christian world is difficult to say; but it is highly unlikely that Paul was thinking in terms of a greater audience for his words. It is more likely that some time during the canonization process, the pieces that universalized the letter were added. By the middle of the second century CE, First Corinthians was being cited and echoed in various other gospels and epistles, many of these would not become part of the Christian canon.⁹⁸

It is generally agreed by most scholars that Second Corinthians is a collection comprised of several originally independent letters.⁹⁹ On the other hand, Kümmel believes that it is possible that Second Corinthians was one letter that Paul had written; however, as he wrote it he would put it down for long periods of time. Then he would pick the letter up again and so it appears that there was several letters pieced together.¹⁰⁰ Most scholars disagree with Kümmel and it seems that while Kümmel’s hypothesis is plausible, it is far more likely that it is fragments from several letters.

As opposed to First Corinthians which became known outside of Corinth soon after it was written; Second Corinthians is not attested until the middle of the second

⁹⁶ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1140

⁹⁷ W. Kümmel. *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 276

⁹⁸ B. Metzger. *The Canon of the New Testament*, p.82-3

⁹⁹ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1148

¹⁰⁰ W. Kümmel. *Introduction to the New Testament*, p.293

century when it is mentioned in the canon of Marcion, circa 140-150.¹⁰¹ However, there is no other external evidence of this letter and no one has been able to fully explain how Second Corinthians got into the Marcion canon.¹⁰² Finally, except for the passage from 6:14-7:1 which is believed to be a post-Pauline interpolation, the rest of the letter(s) is considered to be authentically Pauline.¹⁰³

Paul had probably visited Corinth a second time prior to sending the Second Corinthian epistle.¹⁰⁴ During this second visit, Paul was not treated as well as one would presume him to be, though exactly what happened is unclear.¹⁰⁵ We may actually get a glimpse of the situation if we turn to the Book of Acts in the Christian Bible. There we find in Acts 18:6, Paul getting very angry with the Jews in a synagogue and he yells at them: "Your blood is upon your head! I am pure! From this moment I will proceed to the Gentiles!" Bruce Chilton claims that this was a major break with both the Jews and the Roman authorities.¹⁰⁶ Prior to this time, Paul was attempting to convert Jews to his new way of thinking. If a gentile wanted to convert, Paul would first convert him to Judaism and then to his nascent group. There was a sense that converts first needed to become part of the "chosen" or the Jews. Paul now redefined, at least for himself, who he believed the people of God were, and those who did not agree with him are now excluded from this select group.¹⁰⁷ This could not help but enrage the Jews of Corinth and if Paul was now going to proselytize to non-Jews, this could endanger the status quo with the

¹⁰¹ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1148

¹⁰² *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1148

¹⁰³ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p.816

¹⁰⁴ A.H. Skeabeck, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 329

¹⁰⁵ A.H. Skeabeck, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 329

¹⁰⁶ B. Chilton. *Rabbi Paul, an Intellectual Biography*, p. 165

¹⁰⁷ B. Chilton. *Rabbi Paul, an Intellectual Biography*, p. 165

Romans rulers.¹⁰⁸ This led to one of Paul's companions, Sosthenes, being beaten in the town square. (Acts 18:17) Was this the reason for the letter of tears? There is no consensus agreement on a direct link between this act and the letter of tears.

He then left Corinth, probably before he expected to, and went back to Ephesus. It was at this time that he likely wrote another letter to the Corinthians that has since been lost to history. This second letter is often called the letter of tears and Paul refers to it in Second Corinthians.¹⁰⁹ The letter of tears seems to have moved the community to take action against those who offended Paul, as Second Corinthians is in part, a response to the news of the events that happened in Corinth in response to the letter of tears.¹¹⁰ It is believed from several sources that this letter was written sometime between 56 and 57 CE. Kümmel believes that all of these events took place rather quickly and this letter was written no more than one and half years after the first letter, which would make it around late 56.¹¹¹ Most other scholars have dated the letter to the middle of 57.

The Anchor Bible Dictionary divides this letter into fragments from six different letters: 1) an earlier apology (2:14-6:13; 7:2-4); 2) the letter of tears (10:1-13:10); the letter of reconciliation (1:1-2:13; 7:5-16; 13:11-13:13); 4) a letter of recommendation for Titus and his companions (chapter 8); 5) a letter to the churches of Achaia (chapter 6) and 6) an interpolated passage (6:14-7:1).¹¹² While not all the scholars agree that it is in fact fragments from six different letters, all agree that it is at the minimum from at least two separate letters.

¹⁰⁸ B. Chilton. *Rabbi Paul, an Intellectual Biography*, p. 165

¹⁰⁹ B. Chilton. *Rabbi Paul, an Intellectual Biography*, p. 165

¹¹⁰ B. Chilton. *Rabbi Paul, an Intellectual Biography*, p. 165

¹¹¹ W. Kümmel. *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 283

¹¹² *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1149

The New Interpreter's Bible has still another take on all of the letters:

Before Paul wrote what is now called 1st Corinthians, Paul had written what has come to be called the "previous" letter, his first letter to them (Letter A, lost). After some time, he wrote his second letter to them, which is now called 1st Corinthians (Letter B). Sometime after that letter, he visited them, had the Altercation left and proceeded to write the letter of tears (Letter C, tears). He finds out that the Corinthians repented from their behavior to him and he wrote 2nd Corinthians 1-9 (Letter D). Finally, he uses the 2nd Corinthians 10-13 (Letter E) to warn the Corinthians about intruders that may be coming (Or have come) and to chastise some Corinthians who wanted to become Paul's patrons.¹¹³

While their take on all of these letters is not fundamentally different from other scholars, they make note of a previous letter that other scholars had not. It also illustrates just how intimate a relationship Paul was attempting to cultivate in Corinth and just how important he felt the community was to the church. Taken as an overall picture, Corinth was a community that Paul desperately wanted to have in his fold and the people were not cooperating the way he had hoped they would. From the writing of First Corinthians, to the writing of Second Corinthians 10-13, Paul's relationship with Corinth went mostly downhill! While there was a period that reflected positive improvement in their relationship, which is reflected in Second Corinthians 1-9,¹¹⁴ the relationship then continues its downhill spiral, which as stated, is reflected in 10-13. Paul has not been able to convince the people of Corinth that his way is The Way, as he has to resort to threats and end of time issues. In 2Cor 10:3-4, Paul talks about the weapons that he has to wage war against those who disagree with him. Paul claims that his weapons are not just human weapons but divine. Had the people of Corinth been with Paul, he would not have

¹¹³ *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 7

¹¹⁴ *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 7

to resort to such rhetoric. However, by attempting to influence the people to his side by using scare tactics, it is not so different than politicians of today who claim that only they can stop terrorist threats.

Paul is disturbed throughout the letters with the factionalism and his real or perceived opponents in Corinth. For us to identify who these opponents may have been is problematic at best, as the only information we have about what happened in Corinth is through Paul. Paul has a vested interest in not giving voice to these parties and much of the letters are polemics against them. There is disagreement among scholars regarding not only who these opponents may be, but also just what the issues are with each of these groups. Some of the disagreements among the scholars include: whom they may be, the number of opponent groups, whether the identity of the opponents change over time in the various letters and how serious the opposition was to Paul's leadership.

Kümmel rejects any possibility regarding the identity of opponents except that they must be Gnostics, at least the opponents in First Corinthians.¹¹⁵ He comes to this conclusion by generally refuting any other possibility from Paul's language. For instance, as we shall see shortly, other scholars believe that there were Jewish Christians from Palestine who were among the opponents. These likely would include followers of Peter and they would have followed the *Mitzvah* system and accepted the resurrected Christ. They also would have believed that before you become a "christian" you would have had to convert to Judaism, which would have included circumcision. However, Kümmel states that in First Corinthians since we hear nothing of a demand to fulfill the

¹¹⁵ W. Kümmel. *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 273

Torah and we know nothing of Peter ever staying in Corinth.¹¹⁶ The Torah was still part of the early teachings of Paul and the other "christian" preachers. It was not possible to establish a new social order so different from the existing one, so that the law or Torah had to remain a miranda of the preacher's. Therefore, Kümmel concludes that since the term Torah is never used, the opponents could not have been Jewish. Kümmel then proceeds to dispute each of the various groups that other scholars mention until there are no groups left but the Gnostics. He finally concludes that: "On the basis of the controversy in First Corinthians 1-4 it cannot be assumed, therefore, that in this letter Paul is polemicizing on two fronts."¹¹⁷ Kümmel continues: "the whole letter manifests a front against a Gnostic perversion of the Christian message which attributes to the pneumatics, as those liberated from the perfect redemptive state and an unconditional moral freedom."¹¹⁸ It is difficult for others to assume that there was only one group against Paul. If we remember the demographics of the city of Corinth, it is clear that there were many outside influences on the people. This was an open society with citizens who were on the main, polytheistic and open to other cults and sects.

Many others scholars disagree with Kümmel that these were Gnostics or only one group of opponents expressed in First Corinthians. Murphy-O'Connor thinks that the different groups who continued to question were just individuals whose previous identification allowed them to question and when they accepted christianity were open to other than only the Pauline form.¹¹⁹ In the epistle, Paul specifically names four parties and asks if the people belong to them. (1st Cor 1:12) The four groups that he mentions

¹¹⁶ W. Kümmel. *Introduction to the New Testament*,

¹¹⁷ W. Kümmel. *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 274

¹¹⁸ W. Kümmel. *Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 274

¹¹⁹ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p.799

are himself, Apollos, Cephas (Peter) and Christ. Whether these are four political factions or just as likely house churches that may have been in opposition to Paul, is not clear.¹²⁰ There is little known about the Apollos party and whether or not they were opponents to Paul.¹²¹ It may very well be that the Cephas (Peter) party was the center of opposition. Peter, while never visiting Corinth, was in opposition to Paul in other communities, such as in Galatia and Alexandria.¹²² Peter was the head of a very large and powerful group that had gained many converts within *Eretz Yisrael*. It could be that the reason Paul had to leave *Eretz Yisrael* in the first place is that Peter was too strong for Paul to preach there. Davies posits that it was the Peter group who doubted Paul's credentials as an apostle that was the most vocal anti-Pauline group in Corinth.¹²³ The final group, the Christ faction, little is known about. In fact, according to one scholar, since this party is mentioned only one time suggests to that scholar that this party never really existed and was an ironic addition by Paul as he describes the various opponents' slogans.¹²⁴ Huby speculates that the members of the Christ faction were Judaizers from Palestine who had known Jesus during his life and were challenging Paul's apostolic authority.¹²⁵ Finally, could the use of these names have been simply a rhetorical device to illustrate a point? While it may be possible that there really was not organized opposition to Paul and he was trying to make a larger point, the fact that he spent so much time in Corinth, writing to the community and he was very clearly concerned about what was happening there suggests that there was at least some anti-Pauline opponents.

¹²⁰ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1141

¹²¹ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1141

¹²² *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1141

¹²³ D. Davies. *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, p. 51

¹²⁴ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1141

¹²⁵ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 327

In Second Corinthians, Kümmel argues that Paul is not polemicizing against Gnostics per se, but rather against people in Corinth who are disparaging Paul the person as an apostle of Jesus Christ and were contesting his apostolic office.¹²⁶ Kümmel never really tries to identify who these opponents may be. Other scholars, while agreeing that the opponents are disparaging Paul for the same reason that Kümmel states, attempt to identify the parties. In the New Jerome Biblical Commentary, Murphy-O'Connor believes that it was Jewish Christians who attacked Paul.¹²⁷ He believes that there is some evidence that these were Judaizers from Palestine who had a more favorable attitude to the Law than did Paul.¹²⁸ He further states that other evidence points to the possibility of Hellenistic-Jewish wandering preachers who had a mystical bent.¹²⁹ Georgi identifies this group as different from the opponents in First Corinthians and also having a mystical bent, however he does not label them Hellenistic-Jewish preachers.¹³⁰

It is speculated that though the opponents from First Corinthians are outsiders, the opponents in Second Corinthians are well known to the citizens.¹³¹ In this case, if these people were known to the Corinthians, Paul could not overly misrepresent them as this could lead to him being rejected by the same people he was trying to win over. There is also the thought that the opponents in 2nd Cor 1-9 and the opponents in 2 Cor 10-13 are different opponents.¹³² In the end, barring the introduction of new material that could shed light on just who these opponents may have been, the identity of them will forever

¹²⁶ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 284

¹²⁷ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p.817

¹²⁸ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p.817

¹²⁹ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p.817

¹³⁰ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p.817

¹³¹ *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 13

¹³² *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 13

remain speculative. The fact that opponents existed; that Paul felt threatened enough by them to have as much contact with Corinth as he did and that Paul and his successors felt that they could not completely write them out of the canon suggests just that they were extremely powerful. It also suggests that the church may have followed Paul's lead in ensuing years in trying to silence alternative voices.

While the historicity of the two epistles is very interesting and telling, there is some debate regarding the theological weight of the letters. The argument is that there is a paucity of doctrine and therefore the letters are not that important.¹³³ Others argue that while there may not be much in the way of doctrine, there was a lot of information regarding applied theology.¹³⁴ As stated before, First Corinthians was not unlike other rabbinical responsa from the Jewish world. A community would write and ask questions of a rabbi and the rabbi would respond to the questions and add other information as they saw fit. The back and forth of the letters and visits was an educational process. The citizens of Corinth had been used to living with a variety of people and were unaccustomed to christian morality and "law." They need to learn what was expected of them and it was going to take time and patience. These early preachers had been, of course Jewish and had followed the Torah as their constitution, many of them in *Eretz Yisrael*. The people in the Diaspora, whether Jewish or not, may not have been quite so indoctrinated into what was deemed right and proper. In fact, many of these other cults encouraged the exact behavior that Paul deemed so repugnant.

¹³³ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1148

¹³⁴ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1149

Paul makes the readers of his letters partners in the theological debate.¹³⁵ He instructed them on the christian way of thinking and as situations arose, they would ask questions regarding the morality of the situation. Paul believes that christian belief can be argued in a rational way, since he believes that rationality is informed by the Holy Spirit.¹³⁶ For the first time, in the city of Corinth, Paul could number within his set of converts people from the better educated and cultured circles of a cosmopolitan city. But not only were there highly educated people who converted, but also lower class citizens, as in other places who had heeded his call. For the first time, he needs to confront people from diverse backgrounds in their social, intellectual and ethnic backgrounds.¹³⁷ If people had money, then there was a constant tension between the spiritual and the material worlds. Additionally, Corinth was a city with an important harbor and travelers from other lands meant that there would be constant outside influences.

According to Chilton, Paul saw Hellenistic influences as the biggest threat to stability in Corinth.¹³⁸ However, Chilton portrays the struggle as Hellenists against the Hebrews. The issue here is that the Hellenists would then be the early christians or anyone else who was not a Jew. According to Chilton then, the Hellenistic influences were the very people that Paul was preaching to. Using the term Hellenists to describe people should not be looked upon as pejorative. In this country, we Jews would identify ourselves as American when asked for our nationality. Our world view is shaped by the culture of this country we are still Jews, but American Jews. The Hellenists were Jews, christians and others who were shaped by the Greco-Roman culture.

¹³⁵ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1150

¹³⁶ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1150

¹³⁷ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1151

¹³⁸ B. Chilton. *Rabbi Paul, an Intellectual Biography*, p. 167

Paul is forced to take on the subjects of speech, wisdom and knowledge, which are strongly influenced by the Hellenists.¹³⁹ He concludes that because these people are relying so much on these other ways, their faith is immature (1Cor 3:1-4). Paul concludes that love is what is most important of all (1Cor 13:1-13); the love of the people for the church and vice versa. If the people could break through all of their vices and move past all of the acts that they are used to, i.e. polytheism, prostitution, civil courts¹⁴⁰ then they will truly learn that love is most important of all.

These epistles are not completely bereft of theology. Paul stresses that the church should be seen as the body of the Christ, a unified structure where each member plays an important role (1Cor 12:4-27). Taken to the next logical step, the christian does not therefore own his or her own body, but must make decisions in terms of what is best for the whole community.¹⁴¹ In Second Corinthians, Paul uses references to end-time considerations as leverage against the people. He alludes to Christ's judgment for the way they carried themselves in life (2Cor 5:10). Paul seems to be saying that God's power is somehow behind or supporting him and all of his foes will someday be vanquished.¹⁴² This is certainly a change from Paul's message from earlier letters and it would be small wonder if his opponents would take offense at these remarks. Paul also stresses the importance of thinking of Christ as *B'nai Adam* or son of man. This means that Christ was the climax or endpoint of God's creation. If the biblical Adam was the beginning of creation, then Christ was the end. If Christ is the end of creation, then it logically follows that the end of time was close at hand. Another important "Jewish"

¹³⁹ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1153

¹⁴⁰ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1154

¹⁴¹ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 23

¹⁴² J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 23

concept that Paul stresses with Corinth is the concept of *Knesset Yisrael*. *Knesset Yisrael* is a mythical concept of the unity of all Jews, especially going back to land of Judea. This was never really true and certainly after the Diaspora could not have been true at all. This concept plays itself out with Paul in an interesting way. Paul takes the unity of the Jews concept and applies it to the unity among his followers to the body of church; that if the Jews could all be unified then his followers too should all be unified. He then takes the next logical step (for him) and applies the concept to the body of Christ; that is, all nascent christians should be unified in this belief. The problem, of course, is that the unity of Jews was never true and therefore it is impossible to apply this concept to his followers, especially in a city like Corinth.

Paul's fleshing out of the end-times continues when he begins discussing how important our acts are in our body.¹⁴³ An interesting (for me) point that Paul seems to be making is how important works and deeds are in the life of faith. Much of modern Christianity, though by no means all, relies upon faith and acceptance of Jesus as your personal savior in order to be "saved." In these two letters, it is clear that Paul is suggesting that it is not just faith that is important but how a person acts and their deeds that are equally important. Paul had been raised in Judaism and the *mitzvah* system, so it is hardly surprising how much importance he places on acts of *gemilut hasadim*. As stated before, in 2Cor 5:10, Paul holds all Corinthians accountable for what they have done. Paul sees believers as being transformed (2Cor 3:18) and the further they get along

¹⁴³ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 27

in their belief and the way they comport themselves, the more mature they are in their faith.¹⁴⁴

By the end of Second Corinthians Paul sees himself very differently then when he wrote the first letter only a couple of years before. Paul now preaches that God is on his side and that he is the one who can speak of what will happen at the end of time. Perhaps this was not unusual at the time however it can lead one to understand why Paul was having problems in Corinth. He no longer felt that he had to only convert Jews to his church but would be free to convert gentiles and he also believed that he could threaten his opponents with divine retribution. Had Paul had good relations with the citizens of Corinth, he would probably not be threatening them with divine retribution.

In the evolution of the canon of the Christian Bible, it is interesting to note the differences in what the early church writers believed to be part of the canon. According to Metzger, it was not until 367 CE that the canon as we understand it today was set forth by Athanasius.¹⁴⁵ However, this does not mean that that time everyone in the Church was ready to accept this as closed. Even at the time of closure the Syrian and Armenian Churches accepted Paul's Third Epistle to the Corinthians as part of their canon.¹⁴⁶ Prior to this time, different authors and different local churches accepted different writings as part of their canon. As we will see, some accepted parts of certain epistles, but not the whole, or the whole epistle was not known to them at that time. Perhaps some fragments of epistles were not added until later. For instance, Marcion was a wealthy merchant in

¹⁴⁴ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 23

¹⁴⁵ B. Metzger. *The Canon of the New Testament*, p. 7

¹⁴⁶ B. Metzger. *The Canon of the New Testament*, p. 7

Rome around the year 144 CE.¹⁴⁷ Marcion was very much against Judaism and their Judaizing to Christians, so it appears that Marcion added Prologues to most of Paul's epistles to emphasize this point.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, it would seem that any of the "canons" from before 144 would not have these Prologues and we can also assume that the first several lines from each of Paul's epistles are not originally his. Additionally, Marcion believed that Paul was the only legitimate Apostle and therefore any of the other supposed Apostolic writings were false.¹⁴⁹

Another list of a canon of an uncertain authorship but found in the codex Claromontanus was discovered inserted in a Bible between two of Paul's epistles.¹⁵⁰ The codex itself is dated to the sixth century CE. In this canon, while both of the letters to the Corinthians are there, Second Corinthians only had seventy lines, while First Corinthians had 1060 lines. It is impossible to know exactly how many words were on each line; however we can compare the size of today's First Corinthians with Second Corinthians. In today's Christian Bible, First Corinthians has sixteen chapters with no chapters having less than thirteen verses and none with more than thirty nine verses. Second Corinthians has thirteen chapters with none having less than 13 verses and none having more than thirty three verses. It is quite clear then that even though we don't know how long a line was, Second Corinthians as we know it today was not of the same length at whatever time this canonical list had been written.

Of the early canons that Metzger includes, there seems to be a discrepancy between many of them as to whether thirteen or fourteen of Paul's epistles were

¹⁴⁷ B. Metzger. *The Canon of the New Testament*, p. 94

¹⁴⁸ B. Metzger. *The Canon of the New Testament*, p. 94

¹⁴⁹ B. Metzger. *The Canon of the New Testament*, p. 95

¹⁵⁰ B. Metzger. *The Canon of the New Testament*, p. 310

considered sacred.¹⁵¹ However, by 368 with the canon of Athanasius, it appears that fourteen was the accepted number of Paul's epistles, except as previously stated in Syria and Armenia where the Third Epistle to the Corinthians was still accepted as canon.

In regards to Second Corinthians, not all of the early writers would include it in the canon. It may be that it was not fully known until well into the second century CE. It was not attested to until the Marcion canon around 144 CE. Could it be that Marcion, or his followers, were piecing it together from the various fragments of letters that existed from Paul to the citizens of Corinth? It is not surprising that Valentinus, who founded a school in Rome between 140-165 CE and listed a canon, did not include Second Corinthians in his list.¹⁵² As part of this discussion, technology may have played a part also. It was not until the latter half of the second century CE that Christians accepted the codex as opposed to scrolls as a means of transmitting their canon.¹⁵³ This allowed for a much greater amount of material to be included in the canon. Prior to this time, only scrolls were used. Much like the *sefer torah* that Jews use today, only a limited amount of information could be written on each scroll and multiple scrolls would be needed for all the Gospels and Epistles. Therefore, just for ease of use, certain of the epistles may have been excluded. Once the codex was formalized, it was easier to include more of the writings.

¹⁵¹ B. Metzger. *The Canon of the New Testament*, Appendix IV

¹⁵² B. Metzger. *The Canon of the New Testament*, p. 82

¹⁵³ B. Metzger. *The Canon of the New Testament*, p. 109

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Chapter 2

Analysis of Corinthian Commentary

Before we begin to analyze the situation at Corinth and Paul's letters and visits to the city, it is necessary to better understand the political situation that existed there. Due to the dearth of information from that time, it will be impossible for us to reconstruct exactly what was going on and who were in the power positions. The little information we have from that time is from Paul's letters and we can hardly trust that information to be fair and balanced. While today, Paul's voice is the tonal one for that time period that was not the case during those years. Therefore, we will be forced to hazard some guesses as to what was going on at the time. Regardless of whether the guesses are exactly correct, Corinth was a more important city in the Roman pantheon of cities than Jerusalem and probably close to the importance of Rome. It was a crossroads of the known world, or at least the Mediterranean world. It is small wonder that so many different groups and leaders were trying to build and maintain power bases in the city.

The leader and center of the spectrum in Corinth had to be the appointed Roman governor or magistrate. While not necessarily being a leader of the people, since he was not elected, he was Rome's representative and literally had an army behind him that supported him. Rome wanted Corinth to remain a city that was one of their economic engines.¹⁵⁴ This position had to balance the needs of Rome with the reality that Corinth was an open, pluralistic society that many preachers and other politicians wanted to

¹⁵⁴ C.K. Barrett. *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 2.

influence. The great likelihood was that this position was a stepping stone back to Rome and what was then considered real power. Therefore, the position that governed Corinth was probably somewhat of a revolving door and it really did not matter how popular the person was with the people he governed. As long as he kept society relatively stable and the revenue flowing to Rome, the Emperor would be satisfied with the job the governor was doing.

As was alluded to in an earlier chapter, there was a host of different groups in Corinth vying for position and influence. It would probably not be worthwhile to look at all these groups in the liberal/conservative mode as we think of those terms today. The spectrum would better be understood as which group or political party someone belonged to and whether or not and how close that party was to the political power; and which group was probably fringe and therefore less threatening. This may sound like a paradox, but the reality is that groups in power seldom care very much about the fringe groups.¹⁵⁵ Power groups are most threatened by groups that are closest to themselves because those groups are fighting for the same constituents. The further a group is from your political agenda and position on the spectrum, the less concerned you are with them.

The nascent christian groups were probably well within the mainstream of Corinthian society and therefore represented a power group and a spectrum all of their own. By the very definition of a spectrum, there was a tonal authority.¹⁵⁶ In a sub-spectrum, there would also be a tonal authority. It is hard to say exactly who that authority might have been in Corinth, but we can be comfortable saying that it was not Paul. The reason that we can make this assumption is due to the tone, frequency and

¹⁵⁵ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 5

¹⁵⁶ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 5

content of the letters known as First and Second Corinthians. If Paul's group was the power group it is safe to say that his writings would reflect a position of power as opposed to reflecting a sense of frustration and of being threatened. The tone of his letters contains a stridency that suggests that Paul was extremely concerned regarding his lack of power and was trying to use all of his rhetorical skills to bring the people together under him.

The frequency of Paul's letters suggest that he felt that there were many voices that needed to be suppressed and eventually unified. At the very least, there were three letters (First and Second Corinthians and the letter of tears), but far more likely there were at least six and possibly even more letters. In attempting to put the Corinthian Epistles together from various fragments from the various letters that Paul sent, the early church leaders inadvertently were letting us know that there was constant communications between Paul and the city of Corinth. The frequency of communication was far more than Paul had with any other city. This hints at how important the city was to Paul and that he was not happy with the discourse there.

The content of the letters also shows us that Paul was not only concerned with the issues of day to day life there, but that he was concerned about the allegiance of the people. That he felt the need to comment regarding the leaders that the people felt they belonged to, that he eventually threatens them with divine retribution and that he needs to claim that he is the church lets us know just how concerned he was.

If Paul is not tonal than who was? There is no definitive evidence that would name a specific group to be the tonal voice. However, Peter's (Cephas') group is a logical choice. Peter was the leading group in *Eretz Yisrael*, in Galatia and also in

Alexandria. Paul could not find work in *Eretz Yisrael*, which was probably because of the strength of the Peter group. In both, Galatia and Alexandria there had been confrontations between the Peter and Paul groups.¹⁵⁷ Paul probably felt the most threatened by the Peter group due to these previous confrontations. There is little evidence to suggest that Peter himself had actually been to Corinth, but that does not mean that his influence could not have stretched there. Peter was just as aware as Paul how important a city was Corinth.

Another group within this sub-spectrum was the group that calls itself the Apollos group. There is little information that is known about this group except that Paul mentions Apollos in First Corinthians. But, if we use the premise that a group is most threatened by those groups near them on the spectrum then we can make certain assumptions regarding their philosophy. They were probably part of the resurrectionist movement, they probably had not been Jewish at one time and had to convert and they probably followed the *mitzvah* system as Paul did. Exactly what difference in philosophy they had to Paul is unknowable; still they must not have been united with the Paul group. While many of the scholars regarded Apollos as an ally of Paul and was only being used as a rhetorical device, nevertheless, Paul still used this name in particular when describing who the citizens felt they belonged to.

The final group that Paul mentions by name in this spectrum is the Christ group. As little is known about the Christ group as the Apollos group and speculation is the only way to make any sense of who they may have been. Just the term Christ, which means messiah, suggests that this group believed in a messiah or at least in a messianic age. Did

¹⁵⁷ C.K. Barrett. *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 4.

they believe that Jesus was the resurrected messiah? It is quite likely they did since Paul is clearly threatened by them and includes them in the other groups nearest to his. In the Corinthian epistles it is the first time that Paul equates the body of Christ to the church and that the church is the natural extension of the Christ body.¹⁵⁸ Did Paul usurp this concept from the Christ group in order to sublimate their message into his? It would certainly not be unusual for one group to take over the message of another group in order to make the first group irrelevant.

These were probably not the only groups within what was just described as the christian spectrum. There were probably fringe groups that focused on specific areas of the same message. There were probably groups that called for a much more ascetic lifestyle than these mainstream groups. There were probably groups that did not want to follow the *mitzvah* system. It is important to remember that most of these groups were Hellenistic as they were part of the Greco-Roman worldview and part of that worldview is to have more than one god. Therefore, there were probably groups who wanted to include the Christ as just another god. Regardless, they would have been fringe groups and since Paul never mentions them, we can assume that he was not threatened by them.

Across the entire political spectrum there had to be other groups that did not fit in with the christian sub-spectrum. These other sub-spectrums could have included the general Jewish spectrum, Gnostics, cults to the various Roman deities, cults to other deities and other "secular" groups. The term secular is really a misnomer because none of these groups would be considered religious in the way that we think of religious groups today. Some of these groups may have had more theological (which should be

¹⁵⁸ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 23

thought of as ideological) underpinnings than others but none should be thought of as religions. It is interesting to note that Paul does not mention any of these other groups by name. Many of the modern day scholars attempt to identify the groups named by Paul with these other groups; however, it seems that by doing so they are trying to force a modern day worldview on an ancient world. The likelihood is that the groups that Paul names were part of the christian spectrum and not outside of that world. Until Paul was able to consolidate his power he would have no need of attacking the groups that were outside of his immediate spectrum.

Earlier Corinth was described as a cosmopolitan city in an area that was frequented by many travelers. It was also part of the Roman Empire that was polytheistic and therefore, generally open to accepting other deities and belief systems. For many Romans, it was simply a matter of including the next god into their pantheon of gods. For people coming out of or into the Jewish tradition where there was only one God, it must have been extremely difficult to accept the openness of others. It also must have been difficult for the others to understand why it was so difficult for the nascent christian preachers to accept their openness. Further, in the Jewish tradition the Torah spells out not only many of the legal guidelines but also moral and ethical guidelines as well. This had to be very difficult for a society such as the Romans to accept as things like prostitution was openly accepted and lawful. Where there were few limits on the type of relationships that people could have. Having a preacher come in and tell you that what you have known your entire life is now immoral could not have been an easy transition.

With all that being said, it is not unexpected that in the First Epistle to the Corinthians many of the questions that are posed to Paul are asking questions regarding

the morality of certain situations. If Paul understood the city at all, it should have come as no surprise to him that there was opposition to what he was preaching and misunderstanding as to exactly what was considered immoral or unethical.

Many of the scholars that were cited in chapter one are looking through the prism of a belief in a unified Christianity regarding Corinth. Ultimately for most of these writers, there seems to be a belief that the tonality of Paul was inevitable, probably due to their belief in the sacredness of his message. However, Paul was a politician as much, if not more, than a religious figure (at least as we mythologize religious figures today). Even today, most of our religious figures are politicians and as such, any analysis of them needs to be seen through a political prism in addition to however else one might try and perceive them.

If we look at the discussion regarding the number of epistles that were sent by Paul to Corinth we see a wide range of guesses as to the exact number. Some want to believe that there were only two letters sent, while the fragmentary nature of Second Corinthians suggests that there were a minimum of six letters. Looking through a political rather than a religious prism makes it much easier to accept that there were many letters sent to Corinth. Paul was worried about the political situation there and as his fears increased, so did the stridency of the tone of his letters. There had to have been a back and forth conversation going on with Paul and his disciples in the city. Paul traveled there at least three times and must have written letters both before and after his visits. Therefore, it is inconceivable that only two letters were written.

It is possible that only two letters may have survived to the time that the epistles were canonized. Even this is problematic however when we read that Paul specifically

mentions another letter in Second Corinthians, the letter that has come to be called the letter of tears. Though that letter has never been found, it is clear from Paul's own words that the letter had to have existed at some point. Additionally, the disjointedness of the letters and the seeming passage of time within the letters suggest that they were written over an extended period of time. If as Kümmel suggests that Paul kept putting the letter down and returning to it months later, then we would have assumed a much more leisurely tone to the letters. If Paul had not shown so much concern regarding the happenings in Corinth then perhaps Kümmel could be right; however what Paul writes suggests that he wanted to get his desires known to Corinth as quickly as possible. This would argue against Paul beginning a letter and then only returning to it over time. The more likely occurrence would have been that Paul would have written a letter, sent it to Corinth and then waited anxiously for the answer to which he would have written back quickly.

Another clue regarding the number of letters that Paul sent is how long it took for Second Corinthians to be attested. While First Corinthians was mentioned almost immediately after it had been sent, it took about one hundred years for Second Corinthians to be mentioned anywhere. Then when it was mentioned, it was found in the canon of Marcion who was often seen as heretical. Since First Corinthians was known so quickly, it would only make sense that a second letter would also be known to the outside world as quickly. Something else was apparently going on and it is less likely that one letter was lost than other people were trying to use Paul's letters to fashion another letter to make the point that they wanted made. In this case, Marcion was against those Jews that were Judaizing the local Christians. The end of Second Corinthians finds Paul

threatening anyone who did not agree with him with divine retribution; certainly a message that Marcion could have endorsed. Could it have been that Marcion, or his followers, were busy crafting Second Corinthians from fragments of letters that they had from Paul? We also learn from another source that many of the prologues of the epistles were added into the Marcion canon in the mid-150's CE and that after that canon was usurped the Marcion prologues eventually found their way into the more traditionally accepted canon. Therefore it would seem that Marcion did not have an ethical problem editing Paul's words.

Another question that arises is in regarding the universality of the message to the Corinthians; "With all who call upon the Lord Jesus in every place, theirs and ours." (1 Cor 1:26 and 14:33) This verse was most likely added to the epistle at a later date when other canonical and non-canonical texts were referencing this epistle. The later redactors wanted to make this message seem to be for everyone. Kümmel, however, chooses to believe that Paul understood that his message would someday be for a far greater audience. This is highly unlikely as Paul was busy worrying about Corinth and trying to breach the schisms than he was trying to universalize this particular message. It is hard to imagine that in the middle of all the turmoil regarding Corinth that Paul would have already believed that he would become tonal some day and these letters needed to be universalized.

As early as the Gospel of Luke do we see beginnings of comments regarding the argument over whether followers first need to convert into Judaism before being accepted as a convert to be followers of the resurrected messiah. One of the key ideological points of the Gnostics was that it was not necessary to first convert to Judaism. The Gnostics

were beginning to gain adherents as early as Paul's time, though eventually reached their peak in the middle of the second century CE. It was after this time that the groups that Paul may have singled out as threatening to him in Corinth, eventually had to unite together in order to defeat the Gnostics, hence we have the four gospels canonized. However, we can see in the epistles to the Corinthians at least one of the ways that Paul (or someone later who redacted his letters) was trying to usurp the Gnostics. As mentioned earlier, Paul uses the concept of *Knesset Yisrael* to try to convince his followers to have a unity in the body of the church and then the body of the Cross. First it is the Cross that becomes a symbol for the early christians and then the body of Jesus is added to the cross at some later time.

This symbol had to resonate with the Hellenistic world with its Platonic ideology. It was common for the Greek and Roman gods to be physically portrayed in idolatrous forms. For the people steeped in this worldview to accept another god on another symbol would have been easy and comfortable. Paul, on the other hand, having been raised in the Judaic tradition would have been less comfortable with this. However, he was also a smart politician and could have seen the need to move in this direction. On the other hand, this type of symbolism may have been retrojected into the canon after Paul, when the Gnostics were at their most powerful. For a group like the Judaic groups under Paul, a symbol of the resurrection would have made a lot more sense than a symbol of the death of Jesus. While many of the scholars suggest that being united in the cross was how Paul was trying to unite the church in some theological way; it was probably more of a political move from either Paul or those that came after him to usurp an important symbol of their most threatening opponents.

Chapter 3

First and Second Corinthians: Examples of Factionalism

First Corinthians and to a lesser degree Second Corinthians is rife with examples of factionalism or dissension in the community of Corinth. As already discussed, Corinth was a cosmopolitan, intellectual city with a great number of temptations and a variety of ways of thinking. Paul and the other Jews of the time had known factionalism throughout their lives as the Jewish people and the Roman Empire were frequently fractured. Another important point to note is that in the Jewish tradition, it is acceptable and in fact encouraged to allow discourse and to hear all the learned voices in a discussion. As we can see in the Talmud, it is not unusual to have dissenting voices on the same page as the eventual *halakha*. Paul, on the other hand did not want dissenting voices within the communities where he preached. With a vision of *Knesset Yisrael*, all the would-be leaders of the community would want obedience to their church and to their words. By the latter part of Second Corinthians, it appears that Paul wants the people to see the church and Paul to be one and the same and therefore there is no place for disunity or debate. Paul seems to have taken the myth of *Knesset Yisrael* to the nth degree, that is, not only should people be unified in their Judaism, church and the cross, but also in Paul.

The Greek word for authentic expression is *koinonia* and it was considered the basis for later Christian life, i.e. well after this time when the church had fully separated from its Jewish roots; though this concept is better understood at a more developed time in the Christian church.¹⁵⁹ In the early christian churches, authentic expression would be

¹⁵⁹ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 800

seen as emulating the apostle or leader of your community. Paul and the other leaders of the community were of course, Jews, and this type of expression would easily be classified as proto-rabbinic. Paul, seeing himself as the leader of the nascent church, at least in Corinth, would be very sensitive to any lack of unity. Therefore, in First Corinthians, after his salutations to the community, Paul dives right into the disunity and factionalism issue:

1 Corinthians 1:10

10: Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.

Verse ten is essentially the opening of the epistle as the first ten verses are better classified as greetings and introductions. The very first line we encounter is problematic as there is nowhere else that we find the expression "Lord Jesus" in what are considered authentically Pauline writings. Therefore, we must conclude that this line was probably added at a later time. Paul's other writings focus on the resurrected messiah, without being linked to a specific person. It will be quite some time, well after Paul's time, that the person Jesus and the cross are linked together. When the *New Interpreter's Bible* tells us that "Paul stacks up an overlapping variety of ways in which he thinks their unity in Christ should express itself,"¹⁶⁰ we must be wary. In order to build their power base, any leader will use any means at hand to get their constituents to remain loyal. It would be anachronistic to think that the Jewish Paul and the Jewish community in Corinth would be swayed with rhetoric involving the "Lord Jesus". Additionally as previously shown,

¹⁶⁰ *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 806

about one hundred years later in the Marcion canon, many of the epistles had introductions added in that did not appear in other canons.

The second half of the verse lets us know that the people of Corinth are indeed factionalized and have divisions. Had this not been the case, Paul would not have begun the letter in this fashion; if Corinth was unified, Paul would have either not bothered to mention it, or he would have glorified it. The fact that he mentions this problem in the first line suggests just how concerned he was with factionalism.

First Corinthians 1:11-18:

11: For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. 12: What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." 13: Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14: I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15: so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. 16: (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) 17: For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. 18: For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Paul immediately jumps into the heart of the problem. Regardless of whom Chloe's people are they have let Paul know that there are growing problems in Corinth. The people are aligning themselves with different leaders and heeding the call of that leader. During Paul's first visit, he had spent a good deal of time there and by the time he left, his followers had probably become obedient or at least apparently so. After his departure, events transpired so that the people no longer were quite so obedient. Perhaps Paul had underestimated the openness of the people to other preachers or to other Gods.

Whatever the reason, Paul's words suggest that he was very concerned about what was happening in the city.

From the *New Interpreter's Bible* we read that Paul stresses that the people should be united in mind and outlook (other translation "thought"). Paul believes that the unity believers experience in Christ, is supposed to be so profound and so encompassing that they share the same demeanor, the outlooks and the goals that really matter.¹⁶¹ Whether Paul truly believes this or not is impossible for us to say or know, however, as any good politician would attest, Paul would want his followers to strictly follow his lead and not be swayed by other speakers.

In the *New Interpreter's Bible* we find the following:

The remainder of 1 Corinthians will make abundantly clear that Paul does not confuse unity with uniformity; he does not think that believers must all have the identical views on all things (Rom 14:1) or that they must walk in lockstep. On the contrary, he values the distinctiveness of believers, appreciates their differences of gifts and graces and expects believers to make a range of acceptable but different moral choices. The true unity of believers is established by God's grace, by Christ's love and by the receptions of the Holy Spirit. These all believers share equally and in a constructive way.¹⁶²

Did Paul ever really confuse unity and uniformity? Paul had been raised in a Jewish culture that had seen civil strife and war over the previous two centuries. The beginnings of the Mishnah were probably circulating in *Eretz Yisrael* prior to his leaving and there is certainly the possibility that local *mishnayot* had already been established in various communities. While Paul must have been used to that type of culture, it seems clear from his words that he was looking for a change and no longer wanted diverse

¹⁶¹ *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 807

¹⁶² *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 807

opinions in his communities. As we continue to analyze the commentary of the text and the words of Paul, it will become clear that while Paul may have begun his working with the people of Corinth with an attitude that may have accepted some openness and debate; it is not long after that he is no longer interested in hearing what others have to say. By the end of the Second Epistle, Paul uses strong words with those who disagree with him.

In verses eleven and twelve, Paul states that there are differences amongst the people, most apparently due to the different teachers or leaders of the community. The people relate so closely with their particular teacher, that Paul says that the people are saying that they belong or follow that teacher rather than some overarching unity. Since Paul uses the term "quarreling," it suggests that there is open hostility between the factions, though not a complete break-up,¹⁶³ though what does a complete break up mean? Murphy-O'Connor is suggesting that after Paul's first visit, everyone was united with Paul. Even had Paul gained many adherents after his first visit, united would not be a word that would describe Corinth. The power base that Paul was trying to build would only come with time, if at all.

The term "brothers and sisters" is used thirty eight times in First Corinthians, which is more than twice as many times in any other of Paul's letters.¹⁶⁴ This could suggest a couple of things: the first is that the people are so fractured that they could hardly be considered brothers and sisters. The other thing that this suggests is that Paul is attempting to re-socialize the Corinthians into the understanding that they are now all part of a new family of God and that they need to think of each other differently then in the

¹⁶³ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 800

¹⁶⁴ *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 807

past.¹⁶⁵ On the other hand, it is quite possible that Paul does not want the situation to get out of control and wants to use whatever rhetoric he can to bring the people together.

In verse twelve, Paul highlights the other teachers that the people are following. He mentions himself, Apollos, Cephas (Peter) and Christ. As previously written, Apollos is a close ally of Paul and probably is teaching the same thing that Paul is teaching. Paul may be using Apollos' name to set up his later use of Apollos and his relationship as an example that people can be close regardless of their differences.¹⁶⁶ On the other hand, it is possible that Apollos has begun to separate himself from Paul and sees the opportunity in Paul's absences to begin to grab some power. Cephas or Peter has been a rival of Paul's in other places and therefore it may be the followers of Peter who are the real target of Paul's letter.¹⁶⁷ Finally Paul uses the name of Christ himself as the last teacher. If there was a "Christ" party or church, there is little to nothing known about it anymore. Murphy-O'Connor speculates that there was a group that may have repudiated the various churches entirely and had given their allegiance to Christ directly.¹⁶⁸ Horsley thinks that the term Christ was used here for rhetorical effect.¹⁶⁹ According to these scholars, that would leave only Cephas, or rather the followers of Cephas, as the real target of this epistle. It would seem that with all of the competing traditions in Corinth, with the acknowledged acceptance of divergent viewpoints that while it may be possible that Cephas is the most threatening opponent, it is unlikely that he is the only one.

¹⁶⁵ *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 807

¹⁶⁶ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 801

¹⁶⁷ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 801

¹⁶⁸ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 801

¹⁶⁹ R. Horsley. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, p. 269

The other group that Kümmel believes is the main group that Paul is polemicizing against was the Gnostics. The Gnostics were a group that flourished for several hundred years side by side with the early church. The Gnostics were a syncretistic religion, social group and philosophy that had a somewhat different take on Christianity.¹⁷⁰ They believed that ultimately a soul would be saved by possessing a certain, secret knowledge. They authored other writings where they described how Jesus taught the disciples certain secrets that would save them.¹⁷¹ While this group is not specifically named in these verses, there is likelihood that the Gnostics were present in Corinth. The Gnostics while probably around during Paul's time and are mentioned in various early texts, did not reach the height of their power till well after the time of Paul. While the Gnostics may be one of the opponents threatening Paul, it is unlikely they are the group that Paul is focusing on here. The Gnostics were as yet, not a cohesive political force.

In verse 13, Paul asks is Christ divided? This rhetorical question is posed to let the people know that even if they have an affinity for other preachers, this does not set them apart from believing in Jesus. Paul then proceeds to ask two other questions: Was Paul crucified for you and were you baptized in the name of Paul? Again he is using these rhetorical questions to let the citizens know that there is something greater than all of them, that no preacher is more important than Jesus or the church; if people are not united in the church, than nothing distinguishes believers from non-believers.¹⁷² While the exegetes are suggesting that Paul was above all of this and that he was ultimately only interested in the good of the early church; the reality was probably far different.

¹⁷⁰ B. Metzger. *The Canon of the New Testament*, p. 75

¹⁷¹ B. Metzger. *The Canon of the New Testament*, p. 77

¹⁷² *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 807

There was no Church in the sense of how we think of it today. The vast majority of the people of Corinth may have had some interest in Paul's teachings but they hardly could have been considered united for him. It was more likely that whatever small group had come together after Paul's first visit were already splintering or losing interest.

From verses 13 to 17 Paul discusses baptism and the lack of importance as to who actually did the baptizing. According to the *New Interpreter's Bible*, baptism is definitional for all believers, and Paul is not disagreeing with that; what he is saying is that the identity of the baptizer is an indifferent matter.¹⁷³ The citizens seem to be aligning themselves along the lines of who did their baptism and who is their preacher. The very few people that Paul baptized at Corinth may be the guiltiest of all, as Paul takes the time to name them. On the other hand, perhaps this is not an argument regarding baptism at all, perhaps the different power groups were splintering, that Paul's tonal authority or hope for tonal authority was being superseded by other preachers/ideologues and Paul was trying to bring the disparate groups back together; or if they were never together in the first place, trying to unite them.

In verse seventeen, Paul tells us what he thinks his job is; he does not come to baptize but to proclaim the gospel. Further he states that he does not proclaim the gospel with "eloquent wisdom." Paul sees that many of the citizens of Corinth are swayed by rhetoric; some by aspirations for wisdom; some by knowledge; some by faith and some by power and station.¹⁷⁴ Ultimately, Paul suggests that it is only the power of God, manifested in the mirandum of the cross that has the real power. As already pointed out,

¹⁷³ *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 807

¹⁷⁴ *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 808

in Second Corinthians Paul will lay claim to that power alone and threaten anyone who disagrees with him with that divine power.

In verse eighteen, Paul is trying to differentiate true believers from those around them. A true believer or one who is being saved can understand the message and power of the cross. Those who are not true believers are destined to perish and can not possibly understand what power there is in the cross. As it says in seventeen, wisdom is not how the power of the cross will be understood, only through faith. The way of the world is in fundamental contrast to the gospel.¹⁷⁵ Paul is attempting to distance himself from the other preachers in Corinth and not just distance himself, but also to let the people know that you can attempt to fool yourself into thinking that wisdom or eloquent speech may be enticing in this world; but it is useless for the next world. The Hellenist world was one composed of philosophers and those who practiced rhetorical techniques. The world view of the people was comfortable with that sort of language and theory. It appears that Paul realizes that he cannot compete with the eloquence or the wisdom of other preachers. Paul needs to find other means to convince the people to align under his leadership. The citizens of Corinth had been influenced by the belief in wisdom that is part of the Hellenistic culture and Paul was trying to move them away from that custom.

Paul then moves through a series of arguments and discussions about the differences between the power of humans versus the power of God. Paul is trying to emphasize how it is foolish for people to think that anything they can offer can compete with what God can offer. The next example of factionalism comes in 3:1-9.

1 Corinthians 3:1-9:

¹⁷⁵ *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 811

And so brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as a spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2: I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, 3: for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? 4: For when one says "I belong to Paul," and another "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human? 5: What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. 6: I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7: So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8: The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. 9: For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

After Paul's initial visit and immediately after he left Corinth, the community may have appeared to be considered unified under his leadership; or at least the group that he had been preaching to may have seemed obedient. He states that he had fed them with milk for they were not ready for food and later said that he had planted the seed. It then seems that Apollos was there to water the burgeoning plant. Whether or not Paul had assigned Apollos to Corinth to continue his mission there is unknown, but it does appear that some of Paul's followers were now following Apollos' teaching instead of Paul's. According to Murphy-O'Connor, Paul is now articulating his basic objection to the attitude of the people and that is that they can not be mature Christians if they have not grasped the nature of authentic community.¹⁷⁶ However, it would seem that authentic community for Paul is when the people follow him regardless of whoever is in Corinth and preaching rather charismatically. From the point of view of today's Christians, Paul was using their lack of unity to show that they were not ready for the next step; the next step being to no longer be of the flesh but have Christ in you so that you are now of the

¹⁷⁶ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 802

spirit. From a political viewpoint of the time, Paul was concerned that Apollos may have become an opponent for the affections of the people.

According to Murphy-O'Connor, Paul sees Apollos and himself as really one entity; that they are a single complex instrument. Murphy-O'Connor finds it silly that the people would attempt to set the two men against each other.¹⁷⁷ A more important question to ask is whether it was the people that set the two men against each other or was it the two men who entered into an antagonistic relationship? Even if the people had the power to set the two against each other, why would it have been silly to do so?

Paul's argument, that if the people were truly mature in their christianity then they would understand that it is not the preachers who are important but the belief in the Christ, allows him to put himself above earthly political desires. The foundation of a community that Paul had laid after his first visit was what was important to Paul and he is emphasizing that this is his territory or area to function as apostle. When he says in verse eight that the one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, he is saying that Apollos should be growing the community according to Paul's wishes, or at least not trying to take over Paul's territory. In the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* analysis, we read that Corinthian boasting is an obvious expression of party politics.¹⁷⁸ While Paul is seen as rejecting this party politics and is trying to let the people know that Corinth is his alone to have sway. He is not necessarily rejecting this politics because of some deeply spiritual or religious reason, more likely Paul does not want to lose what he sees as his territory and the benefits that come from having a wealthy group of patrons.

¹⁷⁷ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 802

¹⁷⁸ *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, p. 1143

In verse eight, Paul states that each of the workers, i.e. Paul and Apollos, will receive wages according to the labors of each. This can certainly be interpreted metaphorically in the assumption that these wages are what the people and the preachers will receive by having the faith. This could also be an indictment of the lack of funds that Paul may be receiving from the followers in Corinth. Perhaps this is part of the problem between Paul and Apollos. Apollos may be supported by those followers that originally had followed Paul and Paul has not been receiving what he sees as his due. As we will see, Paul does discuss his financial expectations of the people of Corinth later in the epistle.

In First Corinthians 3:10-17 his argument is further fleshed out:

10: According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. 11: For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. 12: Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw- 13: the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. 14: If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15: If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer the loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire. 16: Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17: If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

Whomever Paul sees as his opponent, he is taking them to task with these words. Paul lays claim to the foundation of the church as he believes that he had begun the church at Corinth and now others are attempting to usurp his control of that foundation. In verse ten he states that it is God's revelation to him that he can make these claims. He

states that each builder must choose with care how to build on it, implying that he is the only one who has the right to power, influence and money over this community. In Romans 15:20, Paul states that he would never build on anyone else's foundation; it thereby appears that he is attempting to set himself up on the moral high ground in this debate. In twelve, Paul is suggesting that the other preachers are not building upon his foundation correctly. They are building with earthly objects, such as gold, silver etc; none of the things that will stand up on the Day, presumably that day is Judgment Day. Perhaps the earthly objects suggest that the other leaders are gaining influence by promising the people certain material goods should they be the chosen leaders. Perhaps these objects are metaphors for the attributes that the other leaders have, for instance silver could connote charismatic speech as in a silver tongue.

While some of the scholars believe that Apollos was a close ally of Paul's, line ten seems to be a direct contradiction to that assumption. Apollos may have begun as Paul's ally but when Paul says that someone else is building on his foundation and that no one should build on another's foundation, he is stating that he is concerned with the direction that Apollos has taken the church. Perhaps Paul thinks that Apollos is attempting to take over what he considers his apostolic territory, or perhaps Apollos is taking the funds that prior had been going to Paul or perhaps there is something entirely different going on. Whatever the reason, it seems that Paul no longer wants Apollos to lead the group that he formed in Corinth. However, in the next instance of factionalism, Paul seems to be returning to Apollos and accepting him as trustworthy. Ultimately, Paul is trying to take the moral high ground, that it is the spiritual and not the material world that is of the most important. It may very well be that Paul can not compete with the

other leaders in wisdom, eloquence or in other materialistic ways and that Paul is attempting to fight this battle in another way.

He ends this section of his argument by teaching that the people themselves are now considered the Temple. This would appeal to the Jewish sense of *Kenesset Yisrael* or the unity of the people. These Jews are far from Jerusalem and there is the possibility that they no longer or may never have related to the Temple. This was a firmly entrenched Diaspora community that had a very different outlook than those who had remained in *Eretz Yisrael*. Paul is appealing to this connection to say the Temple is now here and inside of them. Once they have accepted Christ and have Christ inside of them, then there is no need for outward displays of wealth and boasting. As part of accepting Christ, at least in Paul's eyes, they would be accepting him (Paul) as their leader. If Paul can convince people that only he can bring them to the ultimate spirituality, then he could remain their leader. When Paul says that building upon the foundation that Paul laid with something other than spiritual wealth will surely bring down ruin on the other preacher; Paul is suggesting that only he can lead the people to eternal life and that no matter how aggrandized the other preachers may be in this life, it means nothing for the world to come. Only Paul has had the revelation as to what God wants from this community.

Does Paul really believe that he is the only one who understands what God wants from this community? We will never know the answer to that question but Paul is concerned about his own well being and he understands the importance of the city of Corinth and he understands what the Temple in Jerusalem means to the people. Paul would likely use whatever means necessary to retain his influence. He may very well

believe that he knows God's will, but he also knows his own needs and desires and wants to be the leader of the church.

1 Corinthians 4:1-7 is the next example of factionalism:

1: Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. 2: Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. 3: But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. 4: I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. 5: Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God. 6: I have applied all this to Apollos and myself for your benefit, brothers and sisters, so that you may learn through us the meaning of the saying, "Nothing beyond what is written," so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of one against another. 7: For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as if it were a gift?

A steward and a servant were responsible administrative officers of an estate or political jurisdiction who worked under the authority of and had to be trustworthy to a lord or a ruler.¹⁷⁹ In Roman times, the steward could only be judged by the lord or ruler that he was working for, therefore, Paul is equating himself to the same position and it is only God that can judge him. Paul wants to raise up his own status as above any scrutiny of the real world as he said that he looked over his own actions and feels that he has acquitted himself; only God and Paul can judge Paul's actions. This extraordinary confidence positions him as the one not only to serve as a model but also, like a father, to chide the Corinthians as babies whose growth and faith is like a child's.¹⁸⁰ It is a

¹⁷⁹ M. Coogan. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, p.272.

¹⁸⁰ *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 835.

continuation of his taking the moral high ground, at least in his own eyes. In this world, the only mortal that can judge Paul is himself.

If Paul can no longer be judged by any other person, and if Paul is allowed to judge all other people, then Paul can now judge all of the other preachers in Corinth as well. He has been building this argument over the other preachers from the beginning of the epistle to this point. He alone has been judged as fully acquitted for his actions (even if it was Paul himself who was the judge) and it is he alone who can judge all the others. He has now reached the rhetorical point where he is free to say to the others whatever he wants. While some of the followers in Corinth were accepting of this message, by the mere fact that this is just the first of what will become many letters to the community, there could not have been an overwhelming chorus of others who agreed with him.

In verse six he seems to be giving us another glimpse into who may be the opponents that this diatribe is against. He states that the people will learn from Paul and Apollos the meaning of the phrase, "nothing beyond what is written." There were other preachers in Corinth who were speaking in tongues and others who were spiritualizing over food and drink and rock.¹⁸¹ Instead of using the Holy Scripture or what is now called the Septuagint, or the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible as the basis for their preaching and instead of using the words that Paul had written in his epistles to explain proper conduct; these others were using other means to reach the community. Paul's goal appeared to be to teach the community that none of these other methods were acceptable and only through him could they reach a proper understanding of who and what to follow.

¹⁸¹ M. Coogan. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, p.272

In verse seven, the gift that the people have received is grace.¹⁸² Again, Paul is telling the people of Corinth that it is not their material wealth or their wisdom that separates them but their faith in the resurrected Christ. The argument continues that in this respect, they are all alike and therefore there is no need for division or dissension. Ultimately, they will all have the same thing and they are all equal. This gift was not earned by them because of their wealth or their intelligence. It was given to them through Paul because of their belief. This bestowal of grace is the best that anyone can offer them and boasting about anything else is just foolish.

Why would Paul be making this argument? Perhaps the other preachers were promising financial or material wealth in this world. Perhaps they were preaching about living this life to the fullest and not worrying about what they would receive in the next life, if there was even a next life. The Diasporan community has a Hellenistic world view which looked at this life as the only life that they were guaranteed. These people may not have been comfortable with the idea that there was eternal life. The concept of resurrection and an afterlife was not a long time miranda of the Israelite cult, it became popular only as the Pharisaic tradition began to emerge. It became a more popular idea under the proto-rabbis and under Roman rule. Under Torah, which had been the constitution of the Jews for so many centuries, the afterlife is not dwelt on and there are few details fleshed out about it. It is possible that most of the population was not responsive to Paul's insistence on the next life being more important than this life. Perhaps the other preachers were espousing the importance of this life and people were responding to that.

¹⁸² *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 837

First Corinthians 4:14-21:

14: I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. 15: For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16: I appeal to you, then, be imitators of me. 17: For this reason, I sent you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ Jesus, as I teach them everywhere in every church. 18: But some of you, thinking that I am not coming to you, have become arrogant. 19: But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. 20: For the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power. 21: What would you prefer? Am I to come to you with a stick, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?

Paul is now finishing his opening argument by setting himself up as the father of the Corinthians and therefore the one that all of the people should be imitating. He exaggerates in verse fifteen that you may have ten thousand guardians in Christ but only one father is letting everyone know that he is the only authority that they should be worried about. All of the other preachers are well and good, but he is the one they should be listening to. Paul's call to imitate him arises out of the cultural matrix in which he and his readers live.¹⁸³ In Hellenist society, people tended to emulate those who were considered "above" them. If Paul set himself above the people, especially as their spiritual father, then it would be a normative turn of events for them to follow him and him alone.

Paul then changes tack and discusses his being absent from Corinth. He had hoped to send his disciple Timothy to Corinth to ensure that the people stayed disciplined under Paul's teaching. However, that apparently did not happen. In verse eighteen, Paul

¹⁸³ *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 842

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¹⁸³ *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 842

claims that since the people did not think that he was coming back, they became arrogant and began following other teachings and teachers. Paul seems to then threaten them with his return and the realization that he will show them that it is not words or wisdom that is important, but power. In verse twenty, Paul is letting the people know that getting into the kingdom of God depends on this power and presumably, only Paul has this power.

Finally Paul ends this section with an ultimatum, that is, should he come with a stick or with love and in a spirit of gentleness. Paul is telling them that there will be hell to pay when he returns to Corinth unless everyone falls in line with his teaching. Paul has already proclaimed himself as the father of the community and as the father he has the right to demand that his "children" keep in line and emulate him. From where does he get his power to punish his children? On the earthly level, Paul's church is on the outside looking in regarding the tonal authority of Corinth. Paul can not force the people through any earthly coercion to follow him; so Paul has to use the threat that only he can bring the people to the kingdom of God in the end of days. Any other threat would quickly be seen as empty by the other preachers. Paul must rely on the belief that he has some sort of special bond with the resurrected messiah. By this time, Paul must understand that leaving the community for so long has been a mistake. He had not planned to come back to Corinth so soon, but he realizes that if he does not return soon he will probably lose all the power that he had built.

First Corinthians 6:1-7:

1: When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare take it to a court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints? 2: Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And of the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? 3: Do you not know that we are to judge angels-to say

nothing of ordinary matters? 4: If you have ordinary cases, then do you appoint as judges those who have no standing in the church? 5: I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another, 6: but a believer goes to court against a believer-and before unbelievers at that? 7: In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?

Apparently this section is telling us that there are members of the community who are taking other members of the community to civil court. This was a problem not only in Corinth, but in other areas of the Jewish world. The proto-rabbis and later rabbis were very much against using the Roman courts to contest issues. It later becomes a problem in *Eretz Yisrael*, however at this time, this was a problem in many of the communities in the Diaspora. In verse one, he asks if anyone would dare take another believer to court before the unrighteous. In the Greco-Roman world, only the wealthy and powerful would take someone else to civil court.¹⁸⁴ The Corinthian church had a variety of economic classes within and prior to Paul's mission, the wealthy, we assume, had used the civil courts for such actions. If the ancient courts were anything like today's courts then verdicts assuredly followed the wealthy. Many of the early followers of the nascent church were the disaffected and the outcasts of society. Corinth was unusual in that Paul had attracted a wide variety of people in different economic situations. Paul follows up his first question with the statement in verse two that the saints will judge the world some day and if you are to judge the world, then why is it that you can not judge trivial cases. Paul is implying the true believer, the one who follows Paul's teaching, is to be considered a saint and that even the smallest, the most trivial issue needs to be decided from within, rather than from without.

¹⁸⁴ *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 854

Once again Paul turns to eschatological reasoning to attempt to convince the community to turn or return to his teaching. In verses two and three, Paul implies that the believer will judge this world and also the angels. If the saints will someday judge even the angels, how can they lay routine day to day issues before persons who have no standing in the church?¹⁸⁵ Paul can only answer these questions by saying that the people who allow this to happen should be ashamed of themselves (1Cor 6:5). Paul sums it all up in verse six and seven by saying that just by having these differences is a defeat and that it is better to be wronged and defrauded than it is to bring these matters to a court of unbelievers.

It seems, at least in Paul's eyes, that the community has allowed breaches in the walls between itself and the unbelievers. Paul believes that his followers should set themselves apart from the rest of the world and only judge themselves and hold themselves to a different standard. This was certainly not uncommon in the Jewish community in the Diaspora then and in later times. Until the modern era, Jewish communities were almost always autonomous and policed their own people. Did this signify that many of the people that Paul was speaking to in Corinth were not Jews and therefore not familiar with this tradition? Did this mean that Jews in general were seeking civil restitution for various matters and the people of Corinth were no different? Or did this mean that the followers of Paul's opponents were not considered believers and therefore would not be worthy of passing judgment in the end of days?

Whether this was hyperbole or not, Paul was trying to impress upon the community just how important this issue was to him. Paul knew that taking a fellow

¹⁸⁵ *New Interpreter's Bible*, p. 854

congregant to civil court would always favor the wealthy and powerful and also mean that these people were serving someone besides Paul. If a civil judge was going to rule in your favor, then you would then owe him allegiance. Paul did not want any of his followers to have any sort of dual loyalty. He wanted his community to serve only his church and ultimately, him. He would especially want the wealthy to have only allegiance to him as they would then be better able to support him and the church.

First Corinthians 9:1-14

1: Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?
2: If I am not an apostle to others, at least I am to you; for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. 3: This is my defense to those who would examine me. 4: Do we not have the right to our food and drink? 5: Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas? 6: Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? 7: Who at any time pays the expenses for doing military service? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not get any of its milk? 8: Do I say this on human authority? Does not the law also say the same? 9: For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it for the oxen that God is concerned? 10: Or does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was indeed written for our sake, for whoever plows should plow in hope and whoever threshes should thresh in hope of a share in the crop. 11: If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits? 12: If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we still more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. 13: Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is sacrificed on the altar? 14: In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

This section of the epistle seems to be Paul's way of saying that he has earned the right to be paid for being an apostle, even if he chooses not to accept the money. Paul begins by shaping the argument that not only is he an apostle but as he says in Acts 9, he has seen the Christ; the people of Corinth are the seal of his work in God as he was the one who began the church in Corinth. Just as in all the examples that he cites regarding whom may have the right to reap what they sow, Paul states that he certainly has the most rights to gain support in Corinth.

However, two verses stand out that seem to be telling a different story. In verse six Paul asks if it is "only Barnabas and I" who have no right to refrain from working for a living. This suggests that some of Paul's opponents were being supported by the people of Corinth and it is Paul's group who is either not getting support or is receiving opposition to their request for support. Paul is suggesting that whether or not he will accept the support is not a concern of the people; he has every right to expect to be supported by the community. Since his job is to proclaim the gospel and since God ordained that those who proclaim the gospel should earn their living through the gospel, then Paul is entitled to be supported by the community.

The second verse that is revealing is verse twelve when Paul says: "If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we still more?" This verse is telling us that others are receiving support from the community and that Paul believes that his group has even more of a right to the support than anyone else. Paul is concerned that the community of Corinth is not only following and heeding some of the other preachers, but they are supporting them as well. In Paul's mind, none of the other leaders could possibly be as entitled as he, after all, who else had seen the risen Christ even if it was in a vision. As

Paul has stated in other places in this epistle, it is only through him that the community can find the mature faith. If this is the case, then Paul asks: how can he (Paul) not be receiving the same type of financial support as his opponents?

Is this the core of the problem for Paul? If Paul is not getting the funds that he expects from a community that should be obedient to him, then in reality, how obedient is that community? Ultimately, power comes down to money, if you have the power than you get the money. While Paul may or may not be concerned about the spiritual well-being of his constituents, he is certainly concerned about their financial well-being as that directly reflects upon their ability to support him. Paul would never mention this need for financial support if he was receiving all of the support that he thought he should be receiving. It is only when you are not getting what you are thinking you should be that you make an issue of it. Paul understands that if others are receiving "his" money, than the others are in power and he is not.

First Corinthians 13: 1-13:

1: If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
2: And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3: If I give away all of my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. 4: Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant 5: or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6: it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. 7: It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8: Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. 9: For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; 10: but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. 11: When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish

ways. 12: For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. 13: And not faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

“Praising love in contrast with the overvaluation of spiritual gifts that produces divisiveness, Paul’s sudden shift into the high-blown style of formal, artful praise of a virtue may be a parody of those who are fond of rhetoric.”¹⁸⁶ Some of the other leaders of churches were known to emphasize speaking in tongues in a rapturous way. Other leaders focused on knowledge and prophecy. In the Hellenist world, knowledge was considered an important facet in philosophy and in the hope of finding the greater truths. Undoubtedly, there were other preachers who were espousing an ascetic lifestyle as Paul says in verse three that there are some who will give away all their possessions. Regardless of all of these teachings, Paul finally boils it all down to love, love of the community for the church and vice versa. Paul appears to be taking on all of his opponents at once in this section. No matter what it is that these other preachers speak about, it ultimately comes down to love of the church which should keep people loyal to him.

Once again Paul uses the imagery of the end times in order to try and focus his message. As he spoke about earlier, the Corinthian’s were still immature in their beliefs; in verse eleven, Paul talks about how one would speak as a child and then how one changes and how they would speak as they mature and are no longer children. As they reach the end times, they will be able to see clearer than they possibly could see now. They will also know fully, as opposed to knowing only in part in this life. Paul is suggesting that seeking knowledge in this life will only get you so far. It is only after we

¹⁸⁶ M. Coogan. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, p.286

die, that we will truly be able to see and know. Therefore, the preachers who are speaking about knowledge and using that as the way to greater truths are wrong. As we have seen several times, Paul consistently uses the theme about the end times against his opponents. Since it is only Paul who will take the believer into God's kingdom, Paul will make promises for the end times, since of course who can dispute him?

While the Christian Bible had not been formed when this epistle had been written, much of the Christian Bible centers on faith and that as long as the believer has faith, then he/she does not have to carry out many of the commandments in the Hebrew Bible. This of course was to make it easier for those people who wanted to convert to convert to Judaism first and then to accept the resurrected messiah. However, in this epistle, Paul does not state that faith is the most important virtue, but rather, its love. In the Jewish world, this is reflected in the *Ahavat Rabbah* and *Ahavat Olum* prayers. It may be that at this time, another leader of the community was preaching faith (perhaps Peter's group) and that followers were heeding that message. Paul needed another hook for his church and chose love for the hook. Eventually, the use of faith became the tonal message for the entire Christian Church, which speaks to the need to fuse together various philosophies of the early leaders of the church in order to bring some sort of peace. While today's Christianity is basically Paulinian, this does not mean that the message of other groups did not slip into the final redaction of the Christian Bible. Especially in a city like Corinth, Paul had to compromise in order to assimilate the messages from some of his opponents.

First Corinthians 15:12-19:

12: Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead,
how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the

dead? 13: If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; 14: and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. 15: We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ-whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16: For if the dead are not raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18: Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. 19: If for this only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

Just prior to this passage, Paul restates the end times of the Messiah, that is, he was crucified, died, was raised and appeared to all those that he appeared to until finally he appeared to Paul; though Paul was born a generation later. Paul's argument appears to be answering either one of two questions, or possibly both. These questions would be 1: Was Jesus really raised from the dead? and/or 2: How can Paul be an apostle if he was from a generation later than the original apostles?

Regarding the first question, was the Messiah really raised from the dead, it could be that Apollos, had taught some of the Jewish views that the soul is separable from the body.¹⁸⁷ This means that it is the soul that contains the wisdom of life and that it is the soul that is immortal.¹⁸⁸ If the people believe that it is the soul that is immortal and is with God after one dies, then the whole concept of bodily resurrection not only does not make sense, but is unnecessary. It seems likely, since Paul is addressing this issue that the people believed this and therefore the whole underpinnings of the resurrected messiah would come into question. Paul has to argue that, of course, Jesus has been resurrected and this is true because otherwise your faith would be futile. This is a circular argument

¹⁸⁷ M. Coogan. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, p. 288

¹⁸⁸ M. Coogan. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, p. 288

at best and it really adds no new evidence that Christ had been resurrected except to say that I, Paul, have seen the resurrected Christ.

This leads us to the second question regarding Paul's apostleship: could Paul be an apostle if he had never met the living Christ? Paul's opponents must have been derisive of Paul's claims to be an apostle, especially Peter who had been an apostle. Paul had never met the living Jesus and claims to have seen the resurrected Christ which was why he had converted from Judaism. In fact, Paul had been a persecutor of the early christians prior to this conversion. Paul's contention of being an apostle must rest on the resurrection of the body of Christ, not just the soul. If only the soul is what is resurrected and goes to be with God in the end times, then Paul could not have been visited by the resurrected Christ. Since the resurrection of the dead is the basis for their belief in salvation,¹⁸⁹ Paul was relying on the people's desire to believe in that salvation for his argument. Paul has argued several times about the coming of the end times and only through him will the people come to God. If people want to give that up and follow his opponents then as the last line says, we are of all people the most to be pitied.

This argument points to the Peter group as the main opponent in which Paul was concerned. Peter had known the living Jesus and his group was assuredly emphasizing that point when trying to gain power in the various communities that Peter and Paul were pitied against each other. Paul had to be at a disadvantage in these arguments since Peter was "there". Though Paul never specifically refers to the resurrected Messiah as the person Jesus, he does claim to have been visited by him in his vision.

¹⁸⁹ M. Coogan. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, p. 289

First Corinthians 16:5-12:

5: I will visit you after passing through Macedonia—for I intend to pass through Macedonia—6:and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way, wherever I go. 7: I do not want to see you now just in passing, for I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. 8: But I will stay in Ephesus in Pentecost, 9: for a wide door for effective work has opened for me, and there are many adversaries. 10: If Timothy comes, see that he has nothing to fear from you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, just as I am; 11: therefore, let no one despise him. Send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I am expecting him with the brothers. 12: Now concerning your brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to visit you with the other brothers, but he was not at all willing to come now. He will come when he has the opportunity.

These are the opening verses of the closing of Paul's First Corinthian epistle. He is letting the Corinthians know that he hopes to soon be in Corinth again, but does not want to make a short visit he would like to spend quite some time with them. This is a sign that all is not well in Corinth. In verse nine, Paul states that there are adversaries in Ephesus that he needs to attend to and that a door has been opened there. What that door is, is not stated, however the people of Corinth can certainly relate and understand about adversaries as their community seems to have many different groups vying for their attention. This is a second sign that Paul understands that all is not well in the community. The next sign is that Paul lets them know that Timothy is coming and that the people need to treat him well and let him know that he, Timothy, has nothing to fear from them. The last sign is his statement about Apollos. According to Murphy-O'Connor, he thinks that the Corinthians have set Apollos against Paul.¹⁹⁰ Paul makes it

¹⁹⁰ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 814

clear that Apollos' failure to return to Corinth was not due to any refusal on his (Paul's) part.¹⁹¹ At the end of this letter, Paul is extremely wary of what is happening in Corinth.

Earlier in the letter it appeared that Paul was stating that Apollos and Paul were close allies in what was being preached at Corinth. Many of the scholars had analyzed the material in this way however, it no longer appears that Apollos was quite as close to Paul as they may have thought. In the beginning of the letter, Paul uses four names as possible factions in Corinth. Apollos is one of the names used and it was often stated that Paul was using Apollos for rhetorical effect. Perhaps Paul was concerned about Apollos and felt that he was preaching something different than Paul. Perhaps it had to do with the resurrection of the soul versus the body. Or perhaps it was strictly a political issue. If Paul was away from Corinth for any length of time, perhaps Apollos took this as a chance to gain his own political power at Paul's expense. It certainly seems that at the close of the epistle, Paul no longer sees Apollos as part of the "brethren" or those of his own disciples that he feels that he can openly trust.

As opposed to First Corinthians, Second Corinthians finds Paul in a defensive mode.¹⁹² It seems clear through each of the fragments of letters that comprise Second Corinthians that Paul is fighting against his opponents and in many cases the people of Corinth themselves. There are several theories regarding exactly why Paul is so defensive. The dominant theory is that there has been some sort of financial irregularity regarding his collection for the church in Jerusalem.¹⁹³ Paul was collecting from each of his established churches in Asia and somewhere along the way he was accused of using

¹⁹¹ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 814

¹⁹² J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p.817

¹⁹³ *New Interpreter's Bible, New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Jerome Biblical Commentary*

the money for his own gain. Another theory is that Paul's apostolic authority was being undermined by "Jewish Christians."¹⁹⁴ It seems unlikely that this was either the only group that was undermining Paul and that these were the only reasons for Paul's problems in Corinth. Whatever the actual reasons for Paul's troubles there, these letters indicate that Paul knew his authority was in trouble. By the use of his visits and letters Paul was trying to save his influence in this most important city.

Second Corinthians 6: 14-18:

14: Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? 15: What agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? 16: What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17: Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, 18: and I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

From 6:11 to 7:14 there appears to be an abrupt change in the flow of Paul's letter.¹⁹⁵ Included in this passage are words and phrases that Paul uses nowhere else and the sense of duality that he is stressing here is also not found elsewhere.¹⁹⁶ From a strictly literary perspective, it appears that these lines were taken from somewhere else and dropped in to this space. From another perspective, it may be that Paul was trying to identify an opponent or that someone who later redacted this letter dropped this in to show who Paul's opponent may have been. The first two verses seem to be indicating

¹⁹⁴ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 817

¹⁹⁵ M. Coogan. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, p. 300

¹⁹⁶ M. Coogan. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, p. 300

that the opponent Paul is fighting (at least in this one particular insistence) would have a dualistic viewpoint which may indicate that it was the Gnostics (though there were other groups who had a dualistic approach to their deity). The Gnostics were not particularly powerful during Paul's time, which may suggest that this was dropped in later when the Gnostics were a group to be reckoned with. Although it is possible that the beginning of Gnosticism was taking shape and Paul had recognized the problem. The reference to the term *Belial* is also interesting as the term appears in a number of places in the *Tanakh* which would suggest that the community that Paul is speaking to is a Jewish one; otherwise the reference would be lost on the audience. Generally it is a term meaning scoundrel or evil doer, but it also seems to have connections to Satan or the Devil. In the *Tanakh*, it often appears as the children of *Belial*, which could signify a personification of evil. In any case, it appears to also suggest a dualism to God and Paul would have been familiar with the term from his understanding of the *Tanakh*.

This section whether from Paul's time or later would indicate that there is a concern with a group or groups that have a dualistic view of God. This was not uncommon for the times in fact, the Romans themselves had many gods. Was there a particular group that was infusing itself into the nascent christian church and threatening Paul? There were many who threatened but there is none that we can absolutely identify since there were many groups with dualistic ideas, though none that were specifically identified in Corinth. It would seem that Paul had consistent groups of opponents in Corinth. Whether these opponents were the same as those in First Corinthians, or whether new ones had arisen, Paul was inundated by opposing groups from the very beginning of his founding of his church.

Second Corinthians 10:7-18:

7: Look at what is before your eyes. If you are confident that you belong to Christ, remind yourself of this, that just as you belong to Christ, so also do we. 8: Now, even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it. 9: I do not want to seem as though I am trying to frighten you with my letters. 10: For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech, contemptible." 11: Let such people understand that what we say by letter when absent, we will also do when present. 12: We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they do not show good sense. 13: We, however, will not boast beyond limits, but will keep within the field that God has assigned to us, to reach out even as far as you. 14: For we were not overstepping our limits when we reached you; we were the first to come all the way to you with the good news of Christ. 15: We do not boast beyond limits, that is, in the labors of others; but our hope is that, as your faith increases, our sphere of action among you may be greatly enlarged, 16: so that we may proclaim the good news in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in someone else's sphere of action. 17: "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." 18: For it is not those who commend themselves that are approved, but those whom the Lord commends.

In the opening verse of this argument it seems that one of Paul's opponents in Corinth has been claiming to be confident in belonging to Christ. The opponent must have claimed a unique relationship to Christ, possibly based on acquaintance with the historical Jesus or possibly on his commissioning by someone who knew him.¹⁹⁷ But Paul quickly asserts that no matter what authority this other person claims to have, it is no more authority than Paul believes that he himself has. Paul claims this authority is to build up and not tear down, a possible allusion to what this opponent is doing to Paul.

¹⁹⁷ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 826

This is similar to the earlier argument that Paul faced regarding his apostleship. It is an issue that is probably still being used by his opponents to question the validity of Paul's leadership. By the time that this last fragment of Second Corinthians (10-13) is authored, the situation in Corinth for Paul appears to be dire. The people have rejected him and he is doing whatever he feels necessary to try and bring them back into his fold.

In verses nine through eleven we find that Paul is defending his letters and the strong language that he uses within them. Apparently, Paul is not a physically imposing person and his speaking skills are less than adequate, at least in terms of what the people of Corinth are accustomed to. Whether it is his speaking style or the language he uses when he speaks, he claims to have had his speech called contemptible (v 10). Therefore, Paul has had to use his substantial abilities of persuasion on the high cultural tradition groups to attempt to keep his church together. He is now being forced to defend this style of leadership and he claims that when he is present he will do the same as he claims in his letters. He seems to excuse the strength of one of his letters by saying that if the event had occurred while he was present, he would have used the same language as appeared in the letter. In Hellenistic culture, excellent oratorical skills are considered important for their leaders. Paul does not appear to have these skills and is probably losing adherents because of it.

In verses twelve and thirteen, Paul argues that he can not be compared to his rivals; that while it is acceptable to compare his rivals to each other, Paul's only criteria for comparison should be Christ.¹⁹⁸ Paul is trying to separate himself from his opponents, so much so that he places himself above the fray and only Christ can be the judge of him.

¹⁹⁸ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p.826

This argument was used in First Corinthians when Paul had said that only God and he (Paul) can judge Paul. That he is using this argument again could indicate that either it was a successful argument the first time or that Paul has run out of arguments and is using old ones to reinforce his status. Whatever his opponents feel are their own qualifications, they are boasting about it to the detriment of Paul's reputation.

From verse thirteen through eighteen, Paul is now defending his turf and stating that God gave him this territory in which to preach. He is trying to convince others that his opponents are intruders without mandate.¹⁹⁹ Murphy-O'Connor believes that this territory was authorized to be given to Paul by the authorities in Jerusalem.²⁰⁰ He claims this because of the language that Paul uses to identify his territory. Paul also had sought to evangelize in new territories, while many of these other preachers were willing to "poach" existing territories from the preachers who first brought them into the christian fold.²⁰¹ Paul found this to be inexcusable, even if his opponents were better preachers than himself or more physically impressive, that still did not give them the right to attempt to take over his territory. This is a very basic argument that can still be heard from salespeople of today. If another salesperson intrudes on their territory, they will take their argument to their home office. It does not sound that much different in Paul's time.

Finally in Second Corinthians 11:1-6 we read:

1: I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness.
Do bear with me! 2: I feel a divine jealousy for you, for
I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present
you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 3: But I am afraid that as

¹⁹⁹ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 826

²⁰⁰ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 826

²⁰¹ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 826

the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. 4: For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you submit to it readily enough. 5: I think that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. 6: I may be untrained in speech, but not in knowledge; certainly in every way and in all things we have made this evident to you.

This "fool's speech"²⁰² as various scholars have called it, is a set up by Paul for the harsh words that he is about to extend. After the previous passage when Paul is accused of not having great oratorical skills and rhetorical weight, Paul is attempting to use those skills in accusing the people of following any other leader, regardless of what they profess to believe. Just as Eve was duped by the serpent, so were the people duped by others who did not have the pure and sincere devotion to Christ. In verse four, Paul states that others are coming and proclaiming a different gospel or a different Jesus. His argument appears to be that when any other preacher preaches, they can not be speaking about the real messiah or the real gospel, only Paul can to that. Even though it is only Paul that can preach the true gospel, the people are still following these other preachers.

Does Paul mean that these people who come into the community are coming from the outside and another community or is this just a device to suggest that the people were open to others besides Paul? Murphy-O'Connor suggests that Paul is reacting to outsiders coming into the community to spread a false gospel.²⁰³ However, it seems that there is too much other evidence in other places to suggest that this could be almost anyone and not necessarily an outsider. From Paul's language it appears that he no has any allies in the community, this would include Apollos who was once very close to him.

²⁰² J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 826

²⁰³ J. Murphy-O'Connor. *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 826

To conclude that this one line suggests outsiders are coming into the community and polluting the population seems to be a big jump to a conclusion that is not supported by the majority of evidence.

As time went on Paul had become more and more desperate with the situation in Corinth. He had met with some success when he began the church there, but his underestimating the cosmopolitan population's need to have him there on a full-time basis cost him the unity he so desperately sought. Corinth was not like the other churches he had established; it was a more cosmopolitan and culturally aware place. It was a city that was ripe for various preachers to come and lay the ground work for their own version of the gospel.

Whether or not it was the financial irregularities that were the cause of the people's issues with Paul is less important than the fact that there were issues. Paul's physical presence and his oratorical skills were not considered sufficient for him to use his charisma to maintain his community. His writing skills seemed to be his best weapon in this fight, but the people of the high cultural tradition seemed to grow tired of even those skills. Finally Paul had to resort to insults and eschatological threats in order to try and convince the people that he was indeed the only apostle who knew the true way of Christ. Corinth would never be a great triumph for Paul, whether it was because of the many real or imagined opponents he had there or whether it was because he never completely understood the population. Perhaps the tradition in the Hellenist culture of open debate and acceptance of the tension between sides was more than Paul would ever be able to overcome.

Chapter 4

First and Second Century Jewish Sectarianism

The Hebrew term for sect or heretic is *min* and the plural *minim*. This word occurs frequently in rabbinic literature and was applied to many different types of heretics and sectarians.²⁰⁴ In certain places in the Talmud, it seems clear that the speakers are referring to Jewish heretics only; however in other places, it is clear that the writers are referring to not only Jewish heretics, but others as well. According to Sperber, many of the references to sectarians in the written works, the writers use the Hebrew words *zedoki* and *kuti*. These Hebrew words which would suggest the translation, Sadducee and Samaritan; it is suggested that these words were used instead of *min* in order to pass muster with the Roman censors.²⁰⁵ Whatever words are being used to describe these groups, there would not be a need for their use if the ruling groups did not feel threatened by these opponents. While there may be different textbook definitions of a heretic, in reality it is a person or group who disagrees with the tonal authority and then loses their battle with the tonal authority. If the "heretical" group wins the battle and gets to author the history, then it was the old tonal authority that would be labeled heretic. Therefore, someone is labeled a heretic when the other group gets to write the history.

At different times and in different places the term *min* may be referring to different groups. For instance, according to some historians, in the second century CE outside of the Galilee the term denoted heretic Jews, whereas in the Galilee, at approximately the same time frame, it denoted non-Jewish sectarians.²⁰⁶ This would

²⁰⁴ D. Sperber. *Encyclopedia Judaica*. CD-ROM edition

²⁰⁵ D. Sperber. *Encyclopedia Judaica*. CD-ROM edition

²⁰⁶ D. Sperber. *Encyclopedia Judaica*. CD-ROM edition

suggest that there were different groups threatening authority in different areas and at different times. For example, the Jesus movement had begun in the Galilee and references to heretics there would have focused on his and other Messianic groups, whereas in Jerusalem, the heretics would probably consist of pro- and anti-Roman groups, depending upon which power group was tional.

Some time near the end of the first century CE, Gamaliel II had a benediction against *minim* written, or at least added to the Amidah; this benediction called the *Birkhat Ha-Minim* was understood as a polemic against the Judeo-Christians, Gnostics and other groups that disagreed with him and the tional group. Within this benediction is the phrase, *Malkhut Zaton* or Kingdom of Arrogance and it is assumed that it referred to Roman rule. The same phrase, *Malkhut Zaton* is also found in the Rosh Hashanah liturgy in the *U'vekhen* prayer. The Rosh Hashanah holy day was elevated by the rabbis in importance and it is considered a very universal holy day. Placing a prayer in the daily liturgy and in the liturgy when most people actually attend synagogue would confirm that the tional authority felt under siege and felt the need to affirm at least three times a day and on the High Holy Day, who was in power and who was trying to wrest the power from the tional group. There must have been more pro-Roman groups that were vying for power with Gamaliel to add what would seem to be such a controversial prayer to the daily liturgy.

Another example of just how concerned the leaders were with sectarianism; there occurs in the Talmud, a discussion regarding what to do with the Holy Books of the heretics or *Sifrei Ha-Minim*. In some cases this referred to books that were "Jewish" holy books (such as a Torah) but written by a heretic and in other cases these were books that were very specific to whatever sect that this person may have belonged. For instance, in

the Talmud there is a reference to a book called the Book of Diviners.²⁰⁷ These books could not be treated with the same respect as “official” Jewish books on the one hand; on the other hand, many of them did have the name of God in them. The fact that there was a discussion regarding this in the Talmud, a discussion that remained after all of the edits that the Talmud went through, suggests that this was indeed an important issue for the leaders.

There were many Jewish sects at the same time that Paul was facing many of his opponents in Corinth. Were these groups the same as those that Paul was facing? There is every reason to think that just as the Judeo-Christians felt the need to recruit outside of *Eretz Yisrael*, these other Jewish sects felt the same pressures. The Pharisees had taken full power in Jerusalem, with Rome’s assistance, and had effectively squelched their opponents. We shall see that the Pharisaic spectrum was splintering and any outside groups would have had to look elsewhere for support. There had also developed a sizable Jewish population in the Diaspora; a population that any sect could exploit for financial and political gain.

During this timeframe, the issues associated with the increase in sectarianism had been universal, at least in the Roman sphere of influence. As previously discussed, there were many reasons for the splintering of both the tonal and non-tonal groups within this world view and the Jewish tonal group was dealing with both those that continued to be recognized as Jews and those that were no longer considered Jews. Though it was not until after Paul’s death that his group was no longer considered part of the Jewish spectrum.

²⁰⁷ D. Sperber. *Encyclopedia Judaica*. CD-ROM edition

The term "sects" was first used to describe the various factions within the Jewish world view by Josephus when he described the three sects as Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenes.²⁰⁸ Later he describes a fourth sect under Judah the Galilean; this was a sect under the general Pharisaic spectrum but who differed from the tonal Pharisees in their belief that only God could be their ruler.²⁰⁹ In general, the Pharisees had been supported by Rome and were beholden to Rome for their power. This other group came to be called the Fourth Philosophy. Another sect that Josephus names directly were the Sicarii who appear to be considered zealots during the Judean revolt against Rome from 66-70CE.²¹⁰ This is not to suggest that these were the only sects during all of this time, as pointed out in the first chapter, the Jewish spectrum had been splintered for quite some time and under Roman rule, pressure on it continued to cause it to splinter even more.

Prior to the Judean War, Josephus does not use the term zealot to describe those that were outside of the main spectrum. Instead he uses terms such as *lestai* or *archilestes* which according to Martin Cohen means brigand, bandit, robber and chief-bandit.²¹¹ As Cohen points out however, these translations do not do justice to these words. Instead, we would better understand these terms today to mean something like militant activist.²¹² During the First Century CE, there were a number of these militants that Josephus refers to including: John of Gischala, Eleazer Ben Simon, and Eleazar ben Jair who was probably the leader of the Sicarii at Masada. There were other groups besides the Pharisees that were splintering and Hippolytus tells us that there were at least

²⁰⁸ Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews*, 13:5:9

²⁰⁹ Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18:1:6

²¹⁰ Josephus. *The Wars of the Jews*, 7:10:1ff

²¹¹ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 23

²¹² M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 23

four divisions or parties of Essenes.²¹³ There is not a considerable amount of information regarding these figures to suggest exactly what they stood for and exactly where they may have fit in the spectrum. It is important to note them however because if these are the names that a historian sees fit to include in his writings than they must have had a following and had some influence. It also means that we can infer that there were other sects and groups that operated at the same time that may not have been as large or influential enough for the historian to include. Therefore, we can draw the conclusion that the spectrum was highly activated in *Eretz Yisrael*. Further, we can conclude that this active spectrum would have directly affected Jews and indirectly affected non-Jews in other parts of the world, including Corinth. We can also conclude that there were other groups or factions other than the ones that Josephus and other texts mention.

Towards the middle to the end of the First Century CE, we begin to see the rise of other leaders who affected the Jewish people and the political situation. As discussed in an earlier chapter, there were Houses or Academies where certain leaders and scholars attempted to influence the political spectrum. The two most famous Houses were *Beit Hillel* and *Beit Shammai*. Modern Jews often look back on them anachronistically as academic houses where those who attended were interested in learning and expounding on Torah. More realistically, we should probably look at them as political parties that were vying for power. As part of their structure they had think tanks, much as we have today, and camps or academies to influence young people to follow their philosophy.

Their disputes are contained in the Talmud and within the first four tractates *Zeraim*, *Moed*, *Nashim* and *Taharot*, there are no less than three hundred and fifty

²¹³ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 23

examples of disputes or *mahloket*.²¹⁴ These groups were part of the overall Pharisaic spectrum and were vying to become the tonal authority. The tonal authority was continuing though moving away from the mitzvah system and placing more emphasis on the coming of the Messiah.²¹⁵ It is not surprising that the nascent christian church found fertile ground within the Jewish spectrum. With the Roman oppression, many of the groups had messianic hopes and the Jesus group was not so far from the main Pharisaic platforms.

This time period was remembered as having *zugots* or pairs of houses that were “arguing” over *halakha*. There was probably an element of truth in this at least in regard to their overall opposition to each other; however, there was a broader sense to their arguments and there was more at stake than simply *halakha*. In other words, their arguments had as much to do with power and who would wield it as it did about some arcane point of law. Additionally, there was probably more than just one pair of houses. While these *zugot* were probably the most powerful of all of the groups; the opinions of the lesser parties would eventually either become absorbed into the platforms of the major parties or else they were forgotten by history. Today we remember *Beit Hillel* and *Beit Shammai* as the most famous pair of *zugot*. This is probably more because they got to write the history than it was because they were the only two houses.

In the middle of the first century there were sects that were pro-Roman and anti-Roman. The Hillelites were a pro-Roman group who were established by Rome as Judea’s chief authority figures.²¹⁶ The Hillelites were able to force all of the Jewish sub-

²¹⁴ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 22

²¹⁵ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 22

²¹⁶ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 31

groups, including *Beit Shammai* to buckle under to their authority.²¹⁷ However, as the Hillelites became the clear tonal voices, pressure from internal sub-groups began to mount.²¹⁸ Probably the most famous pro-Roman leader was Yochanan ben Zakkai. Legend has it that ben Zakkai was taken out of a burning Jerusalem in a coffin and asked the Romans that Yavneh, a town further to the north, be given to him to allow him to continue study. In *Gittin* 56-57 we read the following story:

Abba Sikra, the head of the *baryonei* (zealots), was the son of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai's sister. He (Zakkai) sent to him: "Come meet me in secret". Sikra came and Zakkai said to him, "How long are you going to act this way and kill everyone through starvation?" (Sikra) said to him: "If I say anything to the zealots, they will kill me." Zakkai said to him, "Find me a way to get out of the city."

Sikra describes a plan to ben Zakkai about feigning death by putting a rotten carcass in his bed. Zakkai does all of this and his students carried his bed past the zealots to the Roman camp where he meets Vespasian and the following purportedly takes place:

When he reached the Roman camp he said: "Peace be upon you, O king. Peace be upon you, O king! Vespasian said to him, "You are liable for death, first for I am not the king and you are calling me a king. Further, if I am not a king, why did you not come to me until today? He (Zakkai) said to him, "To that you say I am not a king, you are destined to be a king, for if you are not, Jerusalem would not have been delivered into your hands....and for the second, the *baryonai* would not let us leave the city.

Zakkai concludes the discussion by telling Vespasian that because his troops had breached the city walls, he could not escape the city without the zealots seeing him.

Josephus describes this burning and sacking of Jerusalem and while he does not mention any names of those rebelling against Rome, he does mention that there were

²¹⁷ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 31

²¹⁸ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 32

leaders within the walls of Jerusalem fomenting the rebellion.²¹⁹ This scenario has most likely been made up to enhance the legend of ben Zakkai and have history remember him not as a Roman puppet, but as a brave, forward thinking rabbi who saved Judaism. It is far more likely that since ben Zakkai was pro-Roman, the Romans were planning on using him as the Jewish titular leader once the fighting died down. Soon after the burning of Jerusalem, much of the pomp and power of Jerusalem was transferred to Yavneh including the *Beit Din Ha-Gadol* which at some point would come to be called the Sanhedrin.²²⁰

Another pro-Roman leader who probably succeeded ben Zakkai was Gamaliel II and he had taken the title *Rabban*, rabbi or master. Gamaliel furthered ben Zakkai's transformations through Scriptural canonization, liturgical concretization, sectarian exclusion and political rationalization.²²¹ It was becoming clear that these leaders were continuing to remake Judaism from what it had been for so long, and take it in a new direction. The thought of ever going back to the Temple with a sacrificial cult, while given lip service, was clearly being forgotten. It would not be long before local *mishnayot* would begin to appear and new laws formulated. In another hundred years, the *Mishnah* itself would be codified and finally disconnect Judaism, or at least the law, from Torah.

Gamaliel II's work was the strengthening of the new center at Yavneh and the concentration and consolidation of the people around the Torah, constituting an authority

²¹⁹ Josephus. *The Wars of the Jews*, 6:5:2,3

²²⁰ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 32

²²¹ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 32

that would be capable of filling the place of the Temple.²²² To this end he worked for the elevation of the office of the *Nasi*, and for the unification of *halakha*.²²³ While it may seem that arguing for a certain *halakha* is an arcane argument over law, it really has to do with power, who wields it and who has final say over enforcing the law. He endeavored to increase the power of the new center and these actions aroused the strong opposition of the elder scholars of his generation and led to severe struggles.

There were at least three challenges to the *Nasi* or leader of the *Beit Din Ha-Gadol*. The first of which was during this time that Gamaliel was consolidating power. During this power struggle Gamaliel excommunicated the man who led the challenge which was his own brother-in-law, Eliezer b. Hyrcanus.²²⁴ Undoubtedly, this was an example to all the others that Gamaliel would even excommunicate family if they tried to get in his way. Another dispute was with Joshua b. Hananiah; outwardly the issue was in regards to who could fix the time of the new moon. In reality, Gamaliel probably regarded this challenge as a test of the authority of his *Beit Din* and ordered R. Joshua to demonstrate publicly that he accepted the discipline of the *Nasi*.²²⁵ Joshua was more than likely a strong opponent of Gamaliel's and Gamaliel wanted to demonstrate his power, therefore humiliating Joshua. Eventually, R. Joshua bowed to the command of Gamaliel. In Rosh Hashanah 2:8-9 we read about the *mahloket* within the *Beit Din Ha-Gadol* regarding who gets to decide the calendar and when the Holy Days fall. Apparently, the *Beit Din* of R. Joshua had decided that Yom Kippur fell on a different day than did the *Beit Din* of R. Gamaliel. The *mahloket* continues:

²²² S. Abramsky. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CDROM edition

²²³ S. Abramsky. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CDROM edition

²²⁴ S. Abramsky. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CDROM edition

²²⁵ S. Abramsky. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CDROM edition

Rabban Gamaliel sent to R. Joshua: I decree upon you that you shall come to me with your walking stick and your money on Yom Kippur as it falls according to your reckoning. R. Akiba went and found R. Joshua distraught. R. Akiba said to R. Joshua: "I can demonstrate that whatever R. Gamaliel did is done. For it is stated: These are the festivals of Adonai, holy convocations that shall be declared, when you declare them, I have no other festivals than these." R. Joshua said to R. Dosa ben Horkynos, who said to him: "If we are going to reconsider R. Gamaliel's *Beit Din*, then we have to reconsider each and every (decision) *Beit Din* that arose from the days of Moses until now.

At this point the Gemara expounds on each of the many *Beit Din* throughout the ages.

The Talmud continues:

R. Joshua took in hand his walking stick and his money and traveled to Yavneh to R. Gamaliel on the day that Yom Kippur fell on his reckoning. R. Gamaliel arose and kissed R. Joshua on his head and said: "Come in peace my Master and disciple! My Master in wisdom, and my disciple that you accepted my words."

This story shows us the lengths that Gamaliel would go in order to protect the power of the *Nasi*. Joshua had reckoned that Yom Kippur would be on a different day than R. Gamaliel had. This was seen as an affront to Gamaliel and his power. He wanted to show that he had the ultimate power and that any attempt to wrest it away from him would be dealt with sharply. Joshua went to Akiba who was a power broker and tried to get him on his side, which did not work. This also suggests that R. Dosa must have been a power broker, since Joshua also went to him. Seeing no support from these other leaders, R. Joshua finally swallowed his pride and was humiliated by breaking the tradition of Yom Kippur.

The clashes between Gamaliel and Joshua, however, did not cease with this affair. Akiba was able to successfully depose Gamaliel and replace him as *Nasi* with Eleazar ben Azariah. In the end, Gamaliel was able to reclaim at least part of the power of the

Nasi and was reinstated. However, according to the Mishnah (Ber 4:1) Eleazar b. Azariah continued to share the post of *Nasi* with him. The Mishnah states:

R. Akiba said to R. Joshua, you have received your apology, have we done anything except out of regard for you honor? Tomorrow morning we will wait on him. They said: Shall we depose him? (meaning Eleazar ben Azariah) We have a rule that we may raise an object to a higher grade of sanctity but must not degrade it to a lower. If we let one Master preach on one Sabbath and one on the next, this will cause jealousy. Let R. Gamaliel preach three Sabbaths and R. Eleazar ben Azariah one Sabbath.

Gamaliel (and the position *Nasi*) was not only the chief religious authority but also the recognized national-political leader.²²⁶ It is probable that the Roman government also recognized him as the spokesman of the Jews. As previously stated, during his term, he introduced into the Amidah the *Birkhat ha-Minim*. All of these machinations point to a very unsettled political situation with different groups vying for power. It is actually surprising that there were not assassinations taking place; since Rome certainly had its share of assassinations of leadership and it was not uncommon during this time.

After Gamaliel, Eliezer ben Hyrcanus was the next important figure in the leadership under the Romans. After the destruction of the Temple he was numbered among the important scholars of the *Beit Din Ha-Gadol* of *Yavneh*.²²⁷ He also played an important part in national affairs. He was a member of a delegation to Rome headed by the *Nasi* to obtain concessions for the Jews and traveled to Antioch on behalf of the scholars.²²⁸ Eventually Eliezer's views differed enough from the trends of *Yavneh*, that he was excommunicated. Even though it appears that he was excommunicated over a point

²²⁶ S. Abramsky. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CDRom edition

²²⁷ Y. Gilat. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CD ROM edition.

²²⁸ Y. Gilat. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CD ROM edition.

of law having to do with an oven, it actually dealt with points of procedure representing factional platforms of leading sub-groups.²²⁹ Even though he had been excommunicated, he and his followers must have retained certain influence because many of his rulings and opinions remain in the Talmud.

Akiba ben Joseph, one of Eliezer ben Hyrcanus' disciples was the next great leader. Legends abound about Akiba, from his being illiterate until the age of forty, to being tortured to death by the Romans and dying with the Shema on his lips. He is credited with systematizing the *Midrash halachot* and *aggadot*. In the great controversy between Rabban Gamaliel II and R. Joshua which led to Gamaliel's removal from office, not only was Akiba considered as a possible successor but it was he who was probably the power behind the revolution.²³⁰ Eleazer ben Azariah was a disciple of Akiba's and when he shared power with Gamaliel, it is likely to have been Akiba wielding the power in the background.

While he never actually became the *Nasi* himself, Akiba was very much one of the leaders. Akiba supported the authority of the *Nasi*, quoting a scriptural verse to prove that "whatsoever Rabban Gamaliel has done is to be accepted."²³¹ Of course by this point it was in Akiba's interest to support the *Nasi* as his own group was sharing power with Gamaliel. Whether or not he actually helped foment rebellion is unclear, but in 132 C.E. a full-scale revolt against Rome broke out under the leadership of Bar Kochba. Akiba supported the rebellion and apparently named Bar Kochba as the long-awaited Messiah

²²⁹ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 33

²³⁰ M. Cohen. *Two Sister Faiths*, p. 33

²³¹ H. Freedman. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CDROM edition

who would liberate Israel from its oppressors.²³² The other members of the leadership were less enthusiastic about this rebellion. Akiba was later imprisoned and tortured to death by the Romans for openly teaching the Torah in defiance of their edict. It appears that Akiba was at times, someone who supported the status quo, but at other times, especially at the end of his life, he supported Bar Kochba who was trying to overturn the status quo.

Ishmael ben Elisha, who lived in the first half of the second century C.E., was also a leader of a sect. Ishmael was one of the sages the stamp of whose personality and teachings had a permanent effect on *Tannaitic* literature and on Judaism as a whole.²³³ One of the chief spokesmen among the sages of Yavneh, he took part in and expressed his view at all its meetings and assemblies and was present, too, on the day *Rabban* Gamaliel was deposed as *Nasi* and Eleazar b. Azariah appointed in his stead.²³⁴ This suggests that Ishmael had a group that was powerful enough for him to weigh in on an affair as important as this.

His most intimate colleague was Akiba, and he disputed with him on *halakha*, *aggadah*, and both of them lay down and evolved different systems of exposition.²³⁵ Each of them established a school named after him: de-vei ("the house (or school) of") R. Ishmael and de-vei R. Akiba.²³⁶ As discussed earlier, these were not schools as we think of them today, but should be thought of more as a think tank for their political party. He adopted an uncompromising attitude toward the Christian sectarians, then still within the

²³² H. Freedman. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CDROM edition

²³³ S. Safrai. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CDROM edition

²³⁴ S. Safrai. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CDROM edition

²³⁵ S. Safrai. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CDROM edition

²³⁶ S. Safrai. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CDROM edition

Jewish fold, and several of his statements against them and their writings are couched in harsh terms.²³⁷ Undoubtedly, he was attempting to keep these other sects from taking power within the tonal groups. That he needed to speak out against these other sects suggests that they were threatening the centrist power groups. It is unclear whether Ishmael lived until the Bar Kochba rebellion; though it would have been interesting to see what his position would have been vis-à-vis Akiba.

During the Second Temple time and into the post-Temple era there were many written works that represented the views of the subgroups. These subgroups could not get their writings into the canon and therefore many of the works in the pseudopygrapha and in the apocrypha were authored by these different sects. It is small wonder that if it were not for another sect that eventually succeeded, the Judeo-Christians, these texts would have been lost. These were views and opinions that the tonal group did not want propagated and for many Jews today, these stories are not part of their consciousness.

The time of the first and second centuries CE were extremely turbulent times within the Roman world. Due to the harsh conditions that the Romans imposed upon the people of the area, sectarianism was rampant. There was a constant ebb and flow to power and even when external groups were held at bay, such as in the time that the Hillelites were ascendant, this allowed for internal groups to push their agenda. Even today we see that when there is no outside existential threat to a people, this allows for internal divisions to predominate. A case in point is Israel; when the focus of the country is on their external enemies, than internal politics takes a step backwards. When there have been times of peace, the internal divisions, especially those in the "religious"

²³⁷ S. Safrai. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CDROM edition

framework is bared. Just as in the first century, the “religious” groups in Israel today could hardly be only thought of as religious and are much more accurately thought of as political parties. Regardless of first century or twenty first century politics, when certain events occur and influence a society, the political framework will fracture and cause internal and external fissures to become exposed. Existential threats may cover up divisions for a time, but eventually they have to come out into the open and no matter how much the tonal group wants them minimized, two millennia later, we can still see these influences in the writings from the time.

Conclusion

Under the best of circumstances any community will be politically fractured. Even though a community may share a world view, or have a common opponent or even have a communal desire for the same ends; it seems to be part of the human condition to have divergent political means. Power seems to drive people, especially when it is power over others. When a group is not in power their driving interest seems to be to gain power and when they have the power, their driving interest is to keep that power. Ultimately, becoming the power group is often the groups only reason for coming together as a group.

There may be many reasons why this happens, but regardless of why, it is important to accept that even in "religious" communities, it does happen. When we have accepted that power or the desire for it is at the core of relationships, we can better understand what is really happening when we hear about events; whether these events are happening now or if they occurred in the past. For example, what appears to be a simple *machloket* in the Talmud may in fact be a political disagreement where one group is trying to force their political will over the will of their opponents. In the Christian Bible, the authors may have wanted to paint the picture of a united community, but when Paul (or someone else) comes out for or against an issue we should generally assume that it was in reaction to another group being in opposition to him.

There also seems to be a natural desire for the tonal elements of any spectrum to whitewash their opposition, at least in hindsight. For instance, in the epistles to the Corinthians, Paul talks of unity and the desire for all people to be mature or unified in Christ. While we can read the words of Paul and make an assumption that he was above

the political fray and discussing issues of spirituality and religion that would be taking our world view from the twenty first century and imposing it on a very different time. Many of the exegetes talk of the early christian church as if it was the same one that exists today. As they look back they interpret Paul's words as if it was inevitable that his voice would become the tonal voice of Christian life. This was just not the case. As in any political environment, there are many factors that go into who the ultimate tonal voice will be. At the time that Paul was writing, he was one of several voices that could have "won." More than likely many of those other voices are integrated into Paul's words and if Paul was around today, it may be that he would not recognize the words attributed to him.

There is a desire to think in terms of the unity of the early christian church. This is not peculiar to the Christians; certainly in Jewish history we read stories regarding the various sages and how they worked together to enhance the myth of *Kenesset Yisrael*. However, when we look at these same sages with a political lens, Jewish and Christian, we begin to see and understand all of the stresses and factions that existed within the political spectrum. The early Christian church was hardly monolithic and there was no inevitability to its triumph.

The divisiveness that existed in the city of Corinth was not peculiar to that city alone or peculiar to that timeframe. The reason a city is considered cosmopolitan is because of the interchange of ideas; because there is art and theater available and because there is a multiethnic component to the citizenry. Each of these components will help foster the dissemination of new ideas and thoughts and it also suggests that the populace is interested in hearing and learning about these new ideas. If people are not interested in

an environment such as Corinth, they would not live in that particular city they would find another place closer to their individual needs. Any time a society is open to new thoughts, new ideas and discussions regarding them, there will always be different groups taking different sides of any discussions. As more issues are promulgated, more voices and more groups form to espouse those issues and their particular side. Corinth could be compared to a city like New York, insofar as the openness of the society. Just as it would be impossible to unite New York on all issues or frankly even a single issue, the same could be said regarding Corinth. New Yorkers may have briefly felt like one people after the events of September 11, however, that seminal event was just covering over the many divisions within the city.

The Hellenist world view of Corinth encouraged learning, discussion and hence division. The Greek culture demanded that people think, read and discuss. The Jewish culture was very similar in this regard; for present day readers to think that there was some sort of overarching unity of the people would be very simplistic and will not allow the reader to truly understand what was happening. Certainly, as people read their respective sacred texts there may be sets of beliefs that will not allow them to see the divisions that existed during earlier times. Even in non-religious history, people think in terms of the inevitability of the present. This thought process would go something like, we are where are, so this was how it was meant to be. It is easier for many people to accept attitudes such as this than how difficult it may have been and how arbitrary events may have caused us to reach the present. In an apt comparison, there are people who would rather believe the creation story found in the Bible, rather than the arbitrariness of

evolution. For them, it is too frightening to think that humans may not have been inevitable.

Were there alternative possibilities within the first century that could have made things turn out very differently? Just like today as our political leaders make decisions, some that we agree with some that we do not, so did the leaders of that day. Just as people a hundred years from now will be effected by decisions we make today, so too are we affected by decisions made two thousand years ago. Finally, just as we may think that certain decisions are arbitrary and capricious today, so too did the people two thousand years ago. When Bill Clinton was President of the United States, he had to work with a republican Congress. His decisions could not be made within a vacuum and if he wanted them to succeed, he needed to ensure that the Congress had input. The same was true of the time of Paul or the tonal authority in *Eretz Yisrael*. If the leaders wanted their policies to carry the day, they had to ensure that they had enough support from the various factions. We seldom have the written history from those times to fully inform us regarding exactly what events transpired. However, there are enough remaining voices embedded within the history that has been passed down to us and we can read between the lines of what the tonal authority has said to allow us to speculate.

As alluded to before, Corinth can be considered a mirror to the New York City of today. However, to an even broader degree, we can look at the society in general as a mirror of today. The Hellenist society was in turmoil, not just in *Eretz Yisrael*, but also throughout the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was trying to conquer more lands, raise taxes on its existing territory and keep political dissent to a minimum as it chased its dreams of expansion. The position of Roman Emperor was, at times, a revolving door

where assassinations were not uncommon. Rome, at least in the Western world, was the only world power and had hegemony over most of what became Europe and the Mediterranean area. Compare this to present day times; there is one super power in the world that would like to have hegemony over much of the world (the United States). Though our leaders talk in terms of spreading democracy and allowing the rest of the world to be free, the truth is that we are repressing opposition to our views wherever it may be, internationally and domestically.

During first century times in *Eretz Yisrael* when the Pharisees had taken power with the blessing of Rome, increased internal sectarianism took place and helped to cause the society to be in turmoil. The times seem to have accelerated and there was rapid transformation of culture and politics. The Temple was destroyed and this was an event that changed the way people living in *Eretz Yisrael* viewed the world just as the attacks on this country on September 11 did to us. They were both events that would forever change the world and the world view of the people and how they viewed themselves. When seminal events such as these happen, it could take generations before a society regains its footing and returns to "normalcy," whatever that new homeostasis may be.

Just as the roads that Rome built opened the way for a mixing of peoples and cultures like never before, so too today we live in a time of multiculturalism like never before. The internet can be compared to the roads that Rome built. We are exposed to people and ideas that we never would have thought possible only twenty years ago. Through television, telephone and world travel, we are constantly having our sacred thoughts and beliefs challenged by others who may have very different sacrosanct ideas. This keeps us off-balance and creates a desire for comfort in many. A not very

uncommon question that is asked today by congregants is why is it that the world can not be more simple. People want to hearken back to an earlier, less complex time.

The truth is of course, there never was a simpler time. People have always wanted to have power over others, people always wanted to have their view the triumphal one. The difference is, now we hear about things from many different places, not just our Priest, Preacher or Rabbi. We can read many different ideas directly by ourselves and we do not have the filter of a "learned" person telling us what he wants us to hear. Of course, that "learned" person also had an agenda that he imposed through his filter. It is much harder to have a cherished and sacred view of the world when we can and do hear the other side of the argument. When we realize that our leaders today have to compromise and sometimes change their opinions on subjects, we yearn for a time when it seemed that leaders held fast to their views. We elevate our "religious" leaders from an earlier time because the writings that come down to us make it seem as if they always stuck by their guns. It was something that people could count on.

Just like today when people want to hold onto the past when things seemed simpler, no doubt people of that time wanted to hold onto what they knew from their past, the Torah and the Temple. There were leaders who did not want to face the future without the Temple and tried to keep the traditions of that time alive, witness Eleazar ben Hyrcanus, and he was excommunicated for not changing with the times. Paul was trying to reassure his constituents in Corinth with the promise of the after-life since he could not improve their existence in this life. George Bush won two elections after he convinced the American people that only he could assure a safe future for them and their children.

What is the benefit of studying those times vis-a-vis the Judaism and Christianity of today? There are varying reasons regarding how that time can inform our religions of today. There may be some comfort in the knowledge that there has never really been a time when events were simple and we could always count on something. Change is constant and ever present. Exploding the myths of our past can help us understand those times better and apply the lessons they learned to our times. If we believe in the unity of Judaism and Christianity of the past, we will spend more time trying to figure out how to get back to those times, rather than in how can we better manage these times; accepting that unity was a myth that was espoused for political reasons can focus us in the right direction, i.e. the future.

In Judaism, even though there were not denominations as we understand them today, there were many different forms of Judaism that was as different as we are today. For instance, in determining *kashrut* there were many different *minhagim* in different areas. There is a story told in the Talmud about a man who traveled to the Galilee and sat at the table of R. Yose *HaGalil*. R. Yose served the man some sort of fowl boiled in milk. When the traveler returned to R. Judah Ha-Nasi he told him the story and asked if R. Yose should be excommunicated. R. Judah Ha-Nasi said that in the Galilee this was indeed the custom and the *minhagim ha-makom* holds sway. By this we can infer that the reason for the concept of *minhag ha-makom* and that the concept was as important as Torah and Talmud law was that there were many different viewpoints in Judaism, many of them acceptable as long as they were thought out and understood. This would argue then that there always were denominations of sorts and acceptance of differing voices.

For Christianity, it is easy to believe that there was one voice, at least until Martin Luther and that all followers had been united in at least the basic belief in the Christ. However, as we have seen in the epistles to the Corinthians, this was just not the case. There were many differing voices that tried to become the tonal authority and there was no inevitability to the preeminence of Pauline Christianity. That Paul's voice did win out also does not mean that it did not have to incorporate many of the other voices that were raised. As a good politician would, the Paul group was able to integrate the other voices into theirs. This would argue for the understanding that there have always been other voices in the Christian church.

If we understand and accept the reality of differing voices and hence the need for compromise, we will better be able to move forward into a multi-cultural world. The world will not be getting any more united anytime soon. The world is a much "smaller" place now than ever before and will only be getting "smaller." Problems in one part of the world can and will affect people and countries on the opposite side of the world. It was true in Roman times and it is only truer today. Being able to reread our sacred texts with this in mind will help us to understand their times and hopefully apply those lessons to these times.

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