HUMA 3421 The New Testament I

Oct. 2: The Corinthians Correspondence

Read for today’s class: Ehrman, ch. 22 (pp. 368–83); 1 & 2 Corinthians

1. Corinth

* located on the isthmus dividing the northern and southern parts of modern-day Greece; major center of trade and communication, served by two major ports
* built on the north side of the Acrocorinth, an acropolis rising to 1,886 feet above the city
* Corinth known as a pleasure center in antiquity; prostitutes known as “Corinthian girls”; “to corinthianize” meant to be sexually immoral
* 146 BCE completely destroyed in a battle with Rome; remained virtually abandoned until Julius Caesar established a colony of veterans on the site in 44 BCE; became the capital of the Roman province of Achaia in 27 BCE
* a cosmopolitan place, the home of a wide range of religious and philosophical movements
* population: 200,000-400,000; local Greeks, freedmen from Italy, Roman army veterans, businessmen and governmental officials, and Orientals (easterners), including a large number of Jews
* Corinth from Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* (Roman novel composed ca. mid 2nd c. CE)

2. The Corinthian Correspondence

(i) Paul preaches in Corinth ca. 50 CE (Acts 18)

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together—by trade they were tentmakers. Every Sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus. When they opposed and reviled him, in protest he shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent, From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” Then he left the synagogue and went to the house of a man named Titus Justus, a worshipper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the official of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, together with his household; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul became believers and were baptized.”

(ii) Letter A

* written from Ephesus; now lost; mentioned in 1 Cor 5:9-13:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral men; not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But rather I wrote to you not to associate with any one who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or robber—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Drive out the wicked person from among you.”

(iii) The visit of Apollos causes division in the Corinthian church:

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully confuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus (Acts 18:24–28).

(iv) Letter B (=1 Corinthians)

* ca. 54-56 Paul received oral reports about the Corinthian congregation from “those of Chloe” (1:11), and three men—Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus (16:15-18)—who provide additional information about the situation at Corinth
* 1 Cor. is written in response to their concerns
* topics covered in the letter:

A. Apollos (chs. 1-4)

* Apollos is from Alexandria, also the home of Philo Judaeus, a Platonic Jew (20 BCE-45 CE)
* Apollos’ preaching is characterized as full of wisdom while Paul’s is simpler: “I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words of wisdom” (2:4)
* Paul’s hierarchy: the unspiritual (or “those of the flesh”) and the spiritual

B. Civil Law Suits and Immoral Behaviour (chs. 5-6)

* the morality problems appear to reflect a misunderstanding of Paul’s teaching of freedom from the law (“All things are lawful to me,” 6:12)

C. Sex and Celibacy (ch. 7)

* beginning of response (chs. 7-16) to letter received from Chloe or the three men (“Now concerning the matters about which you wrote,” 7:1)
* how to live in the world in view of their belief that the end is soon and that the new age is in many ways already upon them
* Paul appears to have preached that they should remain celibate like him (“It is well for a man not to touch a woman”)
* appeals to the teaching of “the Lord”: “the wife should not separate from the husband (but if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife” (7:10-11)
* people should remain as they were when they were converted (7:17-39)

D. Consuming Food Sacrificed to Idols (chs. 8-10)

* response: do not eat the meat in the temples (or at the festivals) but meat purchased at the market is okay, unless a “weak” member of the church is watching

“But if someone says to you, ‘This has been offered in sacrifice,’ then do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who informed you, and for the sake of the conscience—I mean the other’s conscience, not your own. For why should my liberty be subject to the judgement of someone else’s conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why should I be denounced because of that for which I give thanks?” (10:28-30)

* compare Revelation on the same issue:

I know your works—your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first. But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servants toi practice fornication and to eat food sacrifice to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication…” (Rev 2:18-29)

E. Women’s Roles in the Church (11:2-16)

F. Table Manners at the Lord’s Supper (11:17-34)

G. Spiritual Gifts (chs. 12-14)

H. Restatement of Paul’s “Gospel” (ch. 15)

I. Collection for the Saints (16:1-4)

(v) Paul’s Second Visit (the “Painful Visit”)

* Timothy returns from Corinth with news that the situation has not improved; Paul travels to Corinth himself (see 2 Cor 2:1)
* many had turned against him, and one member even affronted him publicly and undermined his authority with the community (2 Cor 2:5-11; 7:12)

(vi) Letter C (the “Harsh Letter”)

* instead of returning he wrote a harsh letter, a letter written “with many tears” (2 Cor 2:3-4; 7:8-9); Titus carried this letter to Corinth
* either this letter was not preserved or only a fragment of it was preserved, in the harsh chapters at the end of 2 Cor (10-13).
* Titus later reports that the Corinthians were feeling badly about how they treated him and were willing to punish the person who humiliated Paul (2 Cor 7:5-7; 2:5-11).
* the “harsh letter” according to 2 Cor 10-13:
* Paul’s authority challenged by Jewish-Christian “superlative apostles” (11:21-23)
* Paul does not attack their gospel, although he suggests that it is “a different gospel” and that these apostles preach “another Jesus” and that the Corinthians received from them “a different spirit”; instead he attacks them personally as “false apostles, deceitful workmen” and even servants of Satan (11:13-14); Paul makes similar statements against anyone who preached a gospel different from his (e.g. “false brethren,” Gal 2:4; “dogs,” “evil-workers,” “enemies of the cross of Christ,” Phil 3:2, 18).

(vii) Letter D (2 Cor 1-9)

* written in response to Titus’ report in an effort to reconcile with the community. Titus brought this letter to Corinth and oversaw the collection of money for the Jerusalem church (chs. 8-9)
* problem: 6:14-7:1 may be a non-Pauline interpolation (note light/darkness imagery, use of term “Beliar,” characterization of outsiders as evil)

(viii) Paul’s Third Visit

* Paul returned once more to Corinth, perhaps in the winter of 57-58 CE; during that stay he probably wrote the Letter to the Romans

3. The Resurrection According to Paul

Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you — unless you have come to believe in vain. For I handed on to you as of first important what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that *he appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve*. Then he appeared *to more than five hundred brothers and sisters* at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he *appeared to James, then to all the apostles*. Last of all, as to one untimely born, *he appeared also to me*. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them — though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe (my italics) (1 Cor 15: 3-11).